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CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR

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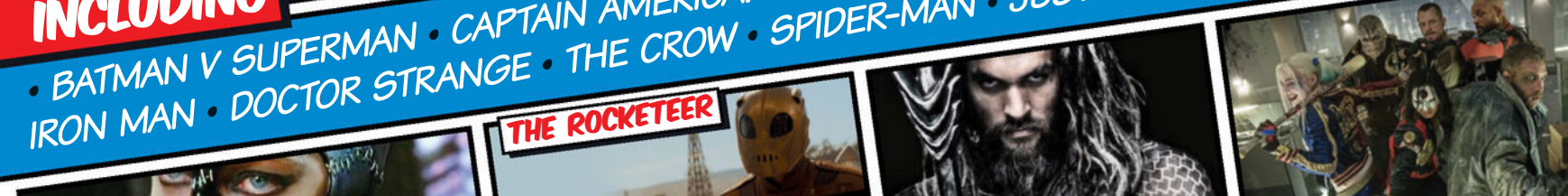
DR STRANGE



INCLUDING

BATMAN V SUPERMAN • CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR • THE MASK • THE ROCKETEER • THOR
IRON MAN • DOCTOR STRANGE • THE CROW • SPIDER-MAN • JUSTICE LEAGUE AND MORE...

THE ROCKETEER



WELCOME TO **SciFiNow** **SUPERHERO** MOVIE COLLECTION

There is no denying that superhero movies are the done thing these days. They are everywhere, from small-time heroes, to saving the entire galaxy, and it's now hard to remember a time where superheroes weren't saturating the market. It's been a long time coming, from Superman's 1966 outing with the wonderful Christopher Reeve, to Henry Cavill's far-more-serious Man of Steel. In this book, we talk to the casts and crews of the biggest films, from the biggest successes to the most disappointing flops. The battle between Marvel and DC continues, with 2016 shaping up to be one of the biggest years for the clash to date, what with *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice*, and *Captain America: Civil War* hitting our screens within just six weeks of each other. Not to mention the upcoming misadventures of *Suicide Squad*. And Ryan Reynolds has finally released the film we all know Deadpool deserves.

Let the battle commence.



SciFiNow **SUPERHERO** MOVIE COLLECTION

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Onwards

THE FUTURE OF SUPERHERO MOVIES

As the Russo brothers usher the mighty Avengers toward their third big-screen rendezvous, DC is building a crossover cosmos of its own around Zack Snyder's *Batman V Superman*. That's just the tip of Stark Tower, as the future of superhero movies is all about the long game...

FEATURED: PAGE 22 CAPTAIN AMERICA 3: CIVIL WAR

DIRECTORS: Joe Russo, Anthony Russo
CAST: Chris Evans, Robert Downey Jr, Sebastian Stan, Anthony Mackie
RELEASED: 29 April 2016

- Following on from *The Winter Soldier*, we can expect many of the threads to be picked up in *Civil War*, seeing Downey Jr co-star as Tony Stark, following the popular *Civil War* comic storyline.

FEATURED: PAGE 31 X-MEN: APOCALYPSE

DIRECTOR: Bryan Singer
CAST: James McAvoy, Michael Fassbender, Nicholas Hoult, Jennifer Lawrence
RELEASED: 19 May 2016

- Taking the *First Class* timeline forward to the Eighties, *X-Men: Apocalypse* will deal with not just the origin of the classic movie team of Cyclops, Storm and Jean Grey, but also the origin of mutant-kind with the undying Apocalypse.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 2: OUT OF THE SHADOWS

DIRECTOR: Dave Green
CAST: Megan Fox, Stephen Amell
RELEASED: 3 June 2016

- The follow-up to the big screen reboot is almost here. We're not sure Shredder will make an appearance, but we're sure to see henchmen Bebop and Rocksteady.

FEATURED: PAGE 16 SUICIDE SQUAD

DIRECTOR: David Ayer
CAST: Margot Robbie, Jai Courtney, Jared Leto, Will Smith, Cara Delevingne, Joel Kinnaman, Viola Davis, Ben Affleck
RELEASED: 5 August 2016

- With a main cast such as this, what can possibly go wrong? The villains are hired by a secret government agency to execute dangerous black ops missions. We wait with baited breath!

FEATURED: PAGE 28 DOCTOR STRANGE

DIRECTOR: Scott Derrickson
CAST: Benedict Cumberbatch, Rachel McAdams, Tilda Swinton
RELEASED: 4 November 2016

- Doctor Strange was teased in *The Winter Soldier*, neatly setting up the Sorcerer Supreme's Marvel Phase 3 debut. After rumours turned out to be true, BBC's *Sherlock* Benedict Cumberbatch will be taking the leading role.

THE WOLVERINE 2

DIRECTOR: James Mangold
CAST: Hugh Jackman
RELEASED: 2 March 2017

- What the altered timeline means for James Mangold's follow-up to *The Wolverine* has yet to be revealed, but the director has pledged to revisit another classic comic-book. Rumour has it that it's a nod to Mark Millar's *Old Man Logan*.

FEATURED: PAGE 28 GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY 2

DIRECTOR: James Gunn
CAST: Chris Pratt, Bradley Cooper, Zoe Saldana
RELEASED: 5 May 2017

- Even before *Guardian's of the Galaxy* blasted the 2014 box office, Marvel had booked the sequel. Not much is known at the moment but it is guaranteed to be just as brilliant as the first.

FEATURED: PAGE 21 WONDER WOMAN

DIRECTOR: Michelle MacLaren
CAST: Gal Gadot
RELEASED: 23 June 2017

- It's finally happening. Not much is known at the moment other than Gal Gadot shall be taking the reigns of Wonder Woman in *Batman V Superman* and it will continue from there.

THE FANTASTIC FOUR 2

DIRECTOR: TBC
CAST: Kate Mara, Miles Teller, Jamie Bell
RELEASED: 14 July 2017

- Undeterred by the mass hatred that was thrown at 2015's rather disastrous *Fantastic Four* remake, Fox are full-steam ahead on a sequel. We don't understand why, to be honest.

FEATURED: PAGE 29 THOR: RAGNAROK

DIRECTOR: Taika Waititi
CAST: Chris Hemsworth, Tom Hiddleston
RELEASED: 28 July 2017

- The story of *Ragnarok* goes that Thor must face the gods and the Norse apocalypse. Loki will most certainly be back and there are rumours that somehow the Hulk will be present. How? We've no idea but we're certainly apocalypse ready.



CAPTAIN
AMERICA:
CIVIL WAR



BLACK
PANTHER



BATMAN V
SUPERMAN



SUICIDE SQUAD



JUSTICE LEAGUE: PART 1 & 2

DIRECTOR: Zack Snyder
CAST: Henry Cavill, Ben Affleck, Gal Gadot, Jason Momoa
RELEASED: 17 November 2017/14 June 2019

- Warner Bros have confirmed returning director Zack Snyder for their long-mooted *Justice League* movie, but with some characters still missing from the classic roster, how will they be introduced?

FEATURED: PAGE 28 BLACK PANTHER

DIRECTOR: TBC
CAST: Chadwick Boseman
RELEASED: 16 February 2018

- Not much is known about the plot of *Black Panther* at the moment, we're sure we'll find out soon enough.

FEATURED: PAGE 21 THE FLASH

DIRECTOR: TBC
CAST: Ezra Miller
RELEASED: 23 March 2018

- Unlike Marvel, DC won't be tying in their successful TV shows to their film franchises, instead, *The Flash* film sees Ezra Miller taking the lead role.

FEATURED: PAGE 29 AVENGERS: INFINITY WAR PART 1 & 2

DIRECTOR: Anthony Russo, Joe Russo
CAST: TBC
RELEASED: 4 May 2018/3 May 2019

- With *Civil War* just around the corner, it's hard to know where *Infinity War* will start, but we do know that Thanos will take a starring role.

FEATURED: PAGE 28 ANT-MAN AND THE WASP

DIRECTOR: TBC
CAST: TBC
RELEASED: 12 July 2019

- Following the success that it was surprising *Ant-Man* was, it's no surprise that a sequel has been shoehorned in. Pushing back *Captain Marvel*, but giving its leading lady a share of the limelight.

FEATURED: PAGE 21 AQUAMAN

DIRECTOR: TBC
CAST: Jason Momoa
RELEASED: 27 July 2018

- Following on from *Justice League*, Momoa will star in his own film as the God of the Sea. Khal Drogo can talk to whales. What more do you need?

UNTITLED SPIDER-MAN REBOOT

DIRECTOR: John Watts
CAST: Tom Holland, Marisa Tomei
RELEASED: 28 July 2017

- Spider-Man will finally be a part of the MCU. It's long awaited, but another *Spider-Man* film so soon after Marc Webb's attempt? It's 50-50 on whether it's welcome or not, but actual-teenage Peter Parker will also be appearing in *Civil War*, so at least we won't have to watch Uncle Ben die again.

GAMBIT

DIRECTOR: Doug Liman
CAST: Channing Tatum
RELEASED: Est 2017

- X-Men producer Lauren Shuler Donner is jonesing to get the ragin' Cajun back on the big screen after his debut was wasted in *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, and Channing Tatum has been confirmed for the role of fan-favourite X-Men antihero – he's even been working on the accent!

X-FORCE

DIRECTOR: Jeff Wadlow
CAST: TBC
RELEASED: Est 2018

- Little is known about the *Kick-Ass 2* director's X-Men spin-off, other than it will blend past and present incarnations of the team – perhaps even bringing some of the classic X-Force characters introduced in *Days Of Future Past*.

SHAZAM

DIRECTOR: TBC
CAST: Dwayne Johnson
RELEASED: 5 April 2019

- After being cast as Shazam, Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson asked to be Black Adam instead.

FEATURED: PAGE 30 CAPTAIN MARVEL

DIRECTOR: TBC
CAST: TBC
RELEASED: 8 March 2019

- Finally, the female lead Marvel film. And it is definitely the Carol Danvers Captain Marvel not the Mar-Vell variety. That's about all we know at the moment.

FEATURED: PAGE 31 INHUMANS

DIRECTOR: TBC
CAST: TBC
RELEASED: 12 July 2019

- There's no cast, no director and no writer. But what we do know is it is based off of the *Inhumans* who first appeared in *Fantastic Four* #45 in 1995.

CYBORG

DIRECTOR: TBC
CAST: Ray Fisher
RELEASED: 3 April 2020

- DC/Warner Bros don't seem to have the confidence to release more than one solo film a year. Other than theatre-actor-turned-big-screen-newcomer Ray Fisher as the title role.

GREEN LANTERN CORPS

DIRECTOR: TBC
CAST: TBC
RELEASED: 19 June 2020

- No. The utter flop that was 2011's *Green Lantern* wasn't enough to deter them from trying again. Fingers crossed it's not as bad as their last attempt. Though that's not possible. Is it?

THE CROW

DIRECTOR: Corin Hardy
CAST: Andrea Riseborough
RELEASED: TBC

- The controversial reboot of *The Crow* revealed its star after months of rumour-mongering, and promises to go right back to James O'Barr's cult comic-book. Originally slated for a 2015 release, there have been endless problems and we still don't know what's happening, or who is tied to the central role.

DEADPOOL



WONDER WOMAN



SINISTER SIX

DIRECTOR: Drew Goddard
CAST: TBC
RELEASED: TBC

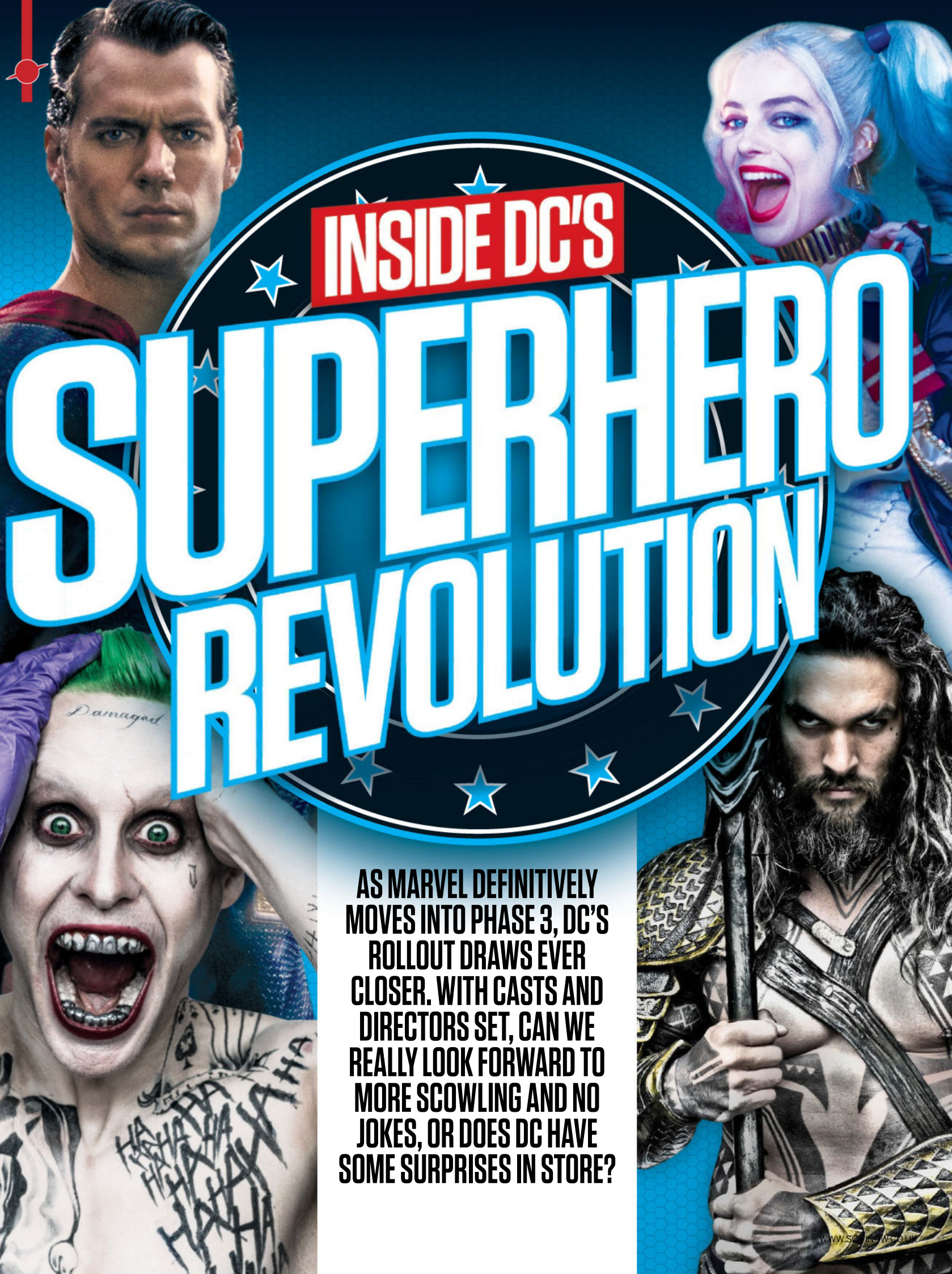
- With the scrapping of Marc Webb's *Amazing Spider-Man* series, it's all a bit up in the air whether or not it is actually happening... but with Drew Goddard attached it's something we want to see.

THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE

DIRECTOR: Chris McKay
CAST: Will Arnett, Rosario Dawson
RELEASED: 10 February 2017

- This spin-off from the 2014 *Lego Movie* has only just come on our radars but new cast members have been announced and we're excited. All together now: "Darkness! No parents!"





INSIDE DC'S SUPERHERO REVOLUTION

AS MARVEL DEFINITELY MOVES INTO PHASE 3, DC'S ROLLOUT DRAWS EVER CLOSER. WITH CASTS AND DIRECTORS SET, CAN WE REALLY LOOK FORWARD TO MORE SCOWLING AND NO JOKES, OR DOES DC HAVE SOME SURPRISES IN STORE?



Shazam!

Stars Dwayne Johnson
Writer Bill Birch **Director** tbc
Released 5 April 2019

Not much is known about *Shazam!* at the moment, just that Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson was offered the leading role, but instead asked to be supervillain Black Adam instead. It's not exactly hard to see why he would fit either character perfectly. According to IMDb, it is about a boy given the ability to become an adult superhero in times of need. Johnson's casting fills us with hope that the rest will be as smooth.

Green Lantern Corps

Stars tbc **Writer** tbc **Director** tbc
Released 19 June 2020

As you can see, there is little more known about the next look into *Green Lantern* than a release date. Which still instills more hope that it'll be better than the 2011 atrocity. Ryan Reynolds has made it up to us since then, what with everything that *Deadpool* chooses to be only filling us with more love for the fantastic movie, but *Green Lantern Corps* would have to be one of the worst films ever released to be worse than its predecessor.

Cyborg

Stars Ray Fisher
Writer tbc **Director** tbc
Released 3 April 2020

It seems that both Marvel and DC are looking to play the same games, what with them announcing within a week of each other that they are planning a superhero movie not led by a white man... Marvel's comes first with *Black Panther* in 2018, but the DCU will take Cyborg for an outing in 2020 played by stage actor Ray Fisher, whose total movie credits so far are 60 per cent made up of the DCU.

Justice League

Stars Henry Cavill, Ben Affleck, Gal Gadot, Ezra Miller, Jason Momoa, Ray Fisher
Writer Chris Terrio **Director** Zack Snyder
Released 17 November 2017

Pretty much everything about *Justice League* depends on what happens in *Batman V Superman*, and will lead into all the other solo movies. Essentially, it's going to be taking on *Avengers: Infinity War*, starting out with two parts based on something they don't know works yet.

It's a risky move on the part of DC, especially taking on the preestablished MCU. We have our fingers crossed!

BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE

HOW THE MAN OF STEEL FOLLOW-UP SETS UP JUSTICE LEAGUE, SUICIDE SQUAD AND BEYOND

Stars Henry Cavill, Ben Affleck, Jesse Eisenberg, Gal Gadot, Jeremy Irons
Writer Chris Terrio **Director** Zack Snyder **Released** 25 March 2016

THERE'S A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COMIC CON AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD. WHEN YOU DROP A TRAILER IN HALL H, THERE'S A GOOD CHANCE THAT YOU'LL BE MET WITH

unmitigated adulation. When a teaser hits YouTube, things can be a bit different.

The first trailer for *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice* leaked prematurely. The quality was poor. What was obviously intended to be dark was so murky as to be barely visible. The darkness of Zack Snyder and David S Goyer's *Man Of Steel* has become a stick to beat DC with, and the leaked trailer for *Batman V Superman* put some nails in that bat.

Then San Diego Comic Con came about, and things became clearer. Batman's enmity with Superman stems from the fact that his battle with Zod at the end of *Man Of Steel* resulted in the destruction of the Metropolis branch of Wayne Enterprises and the death of numerous employees. We also saw Wonder Woman in action, got a first look at Jeremy Irons' Alfred, and discovered that – at least at this point – Eisenberg's Lex Luthor actually has hair (or is it a wig?). Either way, he will be different to other takes on the character, with the actor describing him as having “a real emotional grounding.” Interestingly, Metropolis and Gotham are literally just across the river (described by Snyder as “sister cities similar to Oakland and San Francisco”), although the wealth divide is far wider.

Other rumours remained just that. The casting of Jena Malone as Carrie Kelley (probably) is still unconfirmed, and there are other characters she could be playing, like Barbara Gordon. And we still don't know who Scoot McNairy and his green-screen legs are playing.

Snyder's vision has been supported by Warner Bros, positioning him as the one who has set the tone for their entire

cinematic universe, to the extent that he feels like their Joss Whedon. “That could be,” agrees Arnold T Blumberg, a professor at the University Of Baltimore, who introduced a new course called ‘Media Genres: Media Marvels’. “Marvel has been relying on a guiding hand approach, with certain select people creating a cohesive style that informs every individual project. If DC is looking for someone to fulfil that role, Snyder could be it... They had tried to entice Christopher Nolan, and he wasn't interested.”

Even without Nolan, DC is moving forward. There's still concern over the perceived haste with which the full slate was unveiled, which felt very much like an answer to Marvel's dominance. “The most obvious [difference] is that DC/Warner did not initially pursue a carefully thought-out universe-building strategy with solo films leading into a team-up,” explains Blumberg. “DC's limited *Superman/Batman* cinematic plans finally began heading somewhere only because they're now apparently trying to play catch-up, and that doesn't necessarily lead to good storytelling. For all we know though, everything will be fine, even if it wasn't as carefully planned. Even Marvel's planning wasn't as ironclad as some believe.

“There are other aspects of DC's approach that differ,” he continues, “including a few that just beg the question: ‘Why?’ So far they've been trying to avoid nearly any humour, and they're dead set against providing the sort of interconnected experience that would benefit fans watching DC TV and film projects and seeing a single universe come to life. The differences between the two feel a bit like another rivalry that pits one entity with a history of exciting design and creativity against one with a

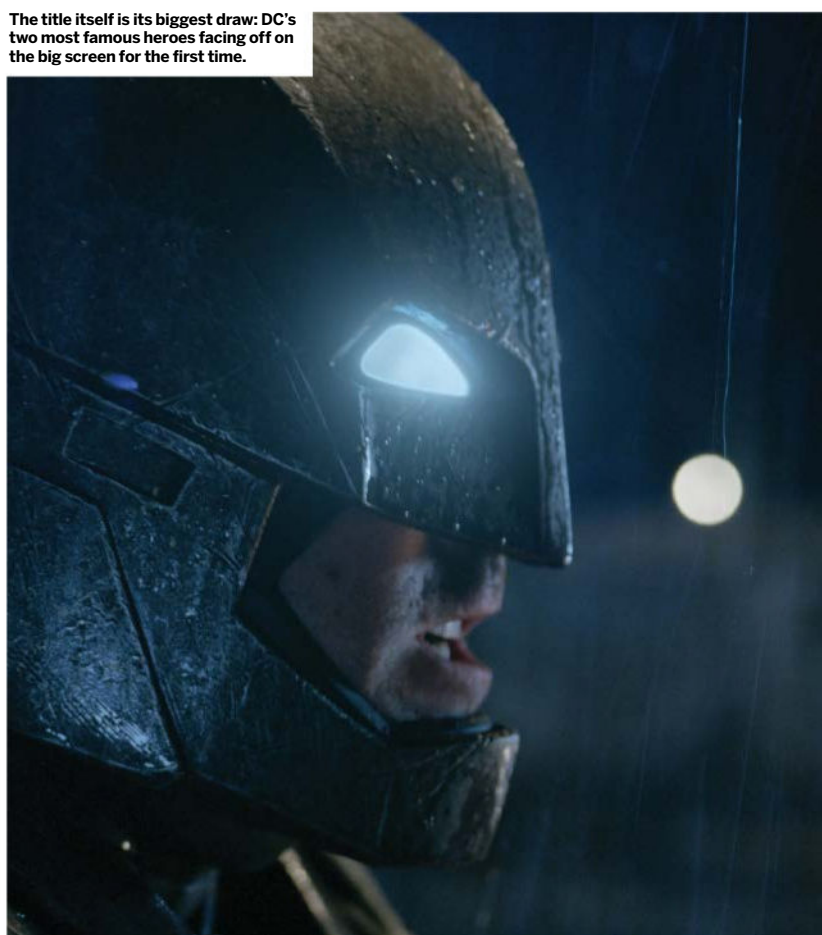


stodgy corporate culture. To put it simply, Marvel is a Mac, DC is a PC.”

Lex has hair – or is it a wig? Questions upon questions...



The title itself is its biggest draw: DC's two most famous heroes facing off on the big screen for the first time.





DC'S SUPERHERO REVOLUTION



GEORGE MILLER'S

JUSTICE LEAGUE

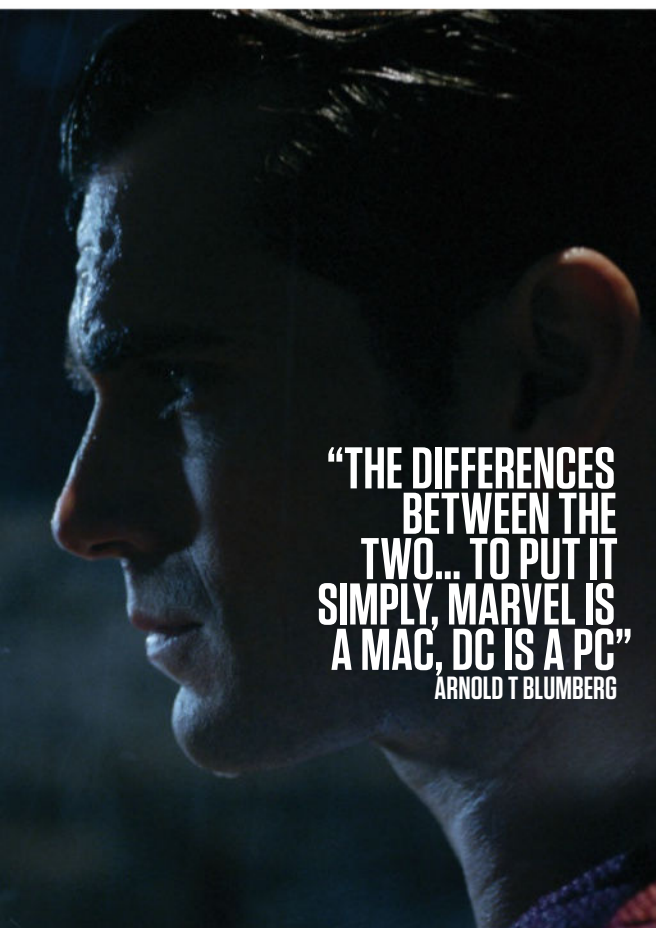
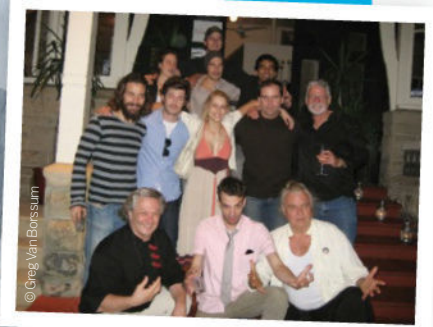
How it could all have been so different

Now that we're used to the idea of Jason Momoa as Aquaman, it's hard to believe how close we were to a completely different *Justice League* movie. Back in 2007, Warner Bros decided that they wanted to develop DC's characters and get a *Justice League* on the big screen asap. They chose *Mad Max* mastermind George Miller to direct, who cast Armie Hammer as Batman, DJ Cotrona as Superman, Megan Gale as Wonder Woman, Adam Brody as The Flash, Common as Green Lantern and Jay Baruchel as villain Maxwell Lord. The film was titled *Justice League: Mortal*. However, the Writers' Strike hit, and it hit hard.

Director Ryan Unicomb is making a documentary about the *Justice League* that could have been, and tells us that we came very close to a completely different DC cinematic universe. "From what we've been able to piece together, DC/Warner were very much looking to build a franchise off of the back of *Mortal*," he reveals. "We know the project was in many ways inspired by the *Justice League 2000/Justice League Unlimited* cartoon series."

Unicomb has no doubt that Miller could have handled the demands of handling a superhero ensemble movie. "George Miller is one of those rare filmmakers who has an understanding of what cinema can really be and how it should be handled, regardless of genre or intended audience... *Mortal* would have dealt with a mixture of big action and danger, but still accessible to children."

Miller's *Justice League Mortal* is currently in production.



"THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO... TO PUT IT SIMPLY, MARVEL IS A MAC, DC IS A PC"

ARNOLD T BLUMBERG

DC's new Batman has a lot to live up to.



While some questions have been answered, others remain frustratingly elusive.

BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE TRAILER BREAKDOWN

SCRATCHING UNDER THE KRYPTONIAN SKIN OF THE BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE COMIC-CON TRAILER



1 Haters gonna hate...

Things kick off with Holly Hunter's senator dropping some truth bombs during an official hearing on the events of *Man Of Steel's* finale, as Clark braves the hateful crowd and enters the courtroom in full costume.



2 Introducing Bruce Wayne

Affleck's Bruce Wayne sprints through the streets of Metropolis into an ash cloud. It's powerful stuff, and the 9/11 parallels are clear. He comforts a lost child by a fallen Wayne Finances logo, and stares up at the sky.



3 It's Alfred!

Wayne Manor! We've seen it derelict in the Nolan movies, but the sleek, functional interior is all Snyder, as is the tire-tugging workout Bruce uses to get back into shape, and we finally get a look at Jeremy Irons' Alfred.



4 The fight begins

Clark condemns Bruce's escapades via *The Daily Planet*, earning him a scolding from Perry (Laurence Fishburne). "You don't get to decide what the right thing is. Nobody cares about Clark Kent taking on the Batman!"



5 Ladies represent

Lois Lane (Amy Adams) reassures him that he's a symbol of hope, and Martha Kent (Diane Lane) tells him that he doesn't "owe this world a thing." It's nice to see some development for Kal-El.



6 He is *Superman*, after all

But he is a silent messiah for mankind. Hovering like an angel over a flooded home, rescuing a child from an inferno, catching a piece of an exploding goddamned spaceship.



© Gage Skidmore

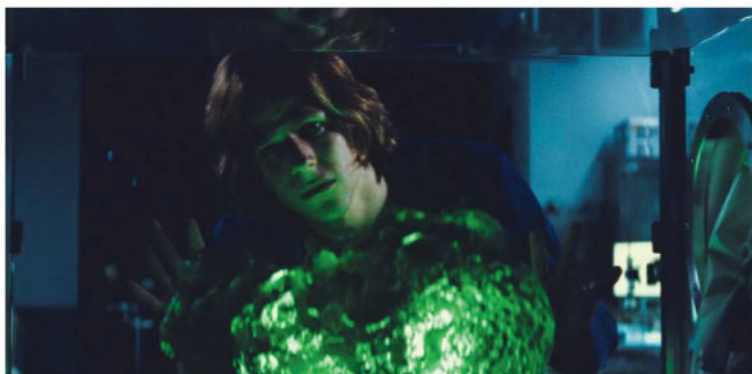
THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS

Why Affleck directing the Batman film is great news

It was rumoured, and then it was confirmed: Ben Affleck would indeed be directing a solo *Batman* movie, collaborating with DC's chief creative officer Geoff Johns. In fact, it seems as though the process is already pretty far along. Johns and Affleck have been storming through the script, which will reportedly be ready by the end of the summer. Johns is obviously a DC veteran, having written for most of the major series and many of the TV projects, like *Arrow*, *Supergirl*, *The Flash* and *Smallville*.

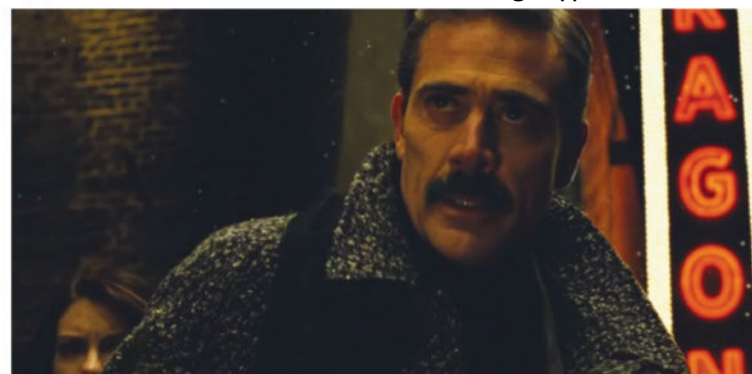
While Johns' DC cred is obviously important, it's that Affleck news that we're most excited about. While many got up in arms about the actor playing the Caped Crusader, surely we can all get behind the idea of the director of *Argo* and *Gone Baby Gone* getting behind the camera to direct a *Batman* movie? We're very keen to see how his love of classic Seventies movies, which has been so powerfully evident in his first three films as director, will appear in a new take on the character.

Currently, the big question is when exactly the film's release date will be. Affleck is shooting his next directorial movie *Live By Night* in November (which he delayed for *Batman V Superman*), so nothing could realistically happen until late next year. But it will need to fit in with *Justice League*, with *Part One* set for 17 November 2017 and *Part Two* for 14 June 2019. Will Warner push their ensemble movies back for another run at the Bat? Or is it more likely that we won't be seeing a solo Bruce Wayne film until 2020?



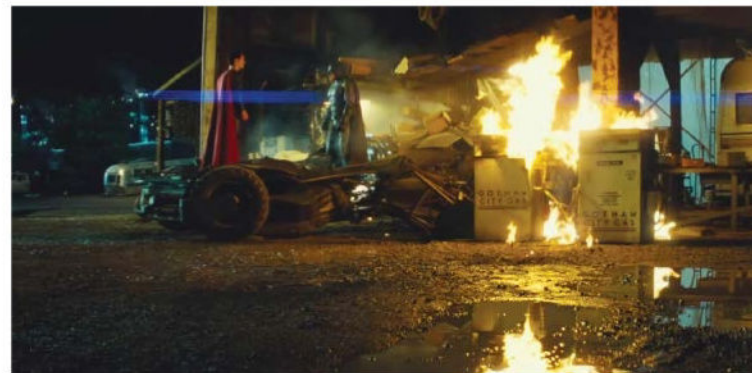
7 Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No! It's Lex Luthor with hair
Finally, it's time for Eisenberg's Lex Luthor! He's got the Senator in his pocket, and he's stroking a clearly angry Supes. We also see Tao Okamoto as Lex's muscle Mercy Graves, and Lex eyes a lump of Kryptonite.

8 The joke's on you
Bruce stares up at Robin's empty suit, on which 'HA HA HA JOKE'S ON YOU BATMAN' is spray-painted. It's a strong nod to *A Death In The Family*, and it could be a hint that Jared Leto's Joker might appear.



9 Supes has some men
A military force bearing Superman's insignia bows before their leader before tangling with a desert-suited Batman. The global implications of Superman's existence will inevitably boil down to a single fight.

10 Blast from the past
Because you can't have a *Batman* movie without showing the fateful night, here's Snyder's *Watchmen* star Jeffrey Dean Morgan as Thomas Wayne getting gunned down in front of his screaming son.



11 Wonder Woman. Finally!
After glimpsing Gal Gadot in her civilian clothes as Diana Prince, Wonder Woman in full costume is the most striking part of what looks like an epic scrap.

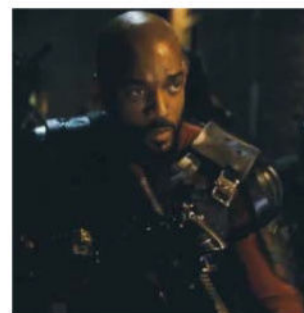
12 Batman V Superman: the face off!
"The red capes are coming! The red capes are coming!" smirks Lex, as Superman tears the roof off the Batmobile, and Batman stands to face him. For all the chaos in this trailer, it all boils down to this.

SUICIDE SQUAD

A MOVIE ABOUT VILLAINS; JARED LETO'S JOKER; THE LONG-AWAITED FIRST BIG-SCREEN, LIVE-ACTION HARLEY QUINN; DAVID AYER DIRECTING; A BATMAN CAMEO, AND WILL SMITH. DC'S BIG GAMBLE AIN'T NOTHING OF THE SORT, PUDDIN'...

Stars Will Smith, Margot Robbie, Jared Leto, Joel Kinnaman, Jai Courtney, Viola Davis
Writer David Ayer **Director** David Ayer **Released** 5 August 2016

Fury director David Ayer has been brought on board for *Suicide Squad*.



The first of its kind, this film is a risk for DC.

LAST YEAR, YOU'D HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN FOR NOT HAVING HEARD OF THE SUICIDE SQUAD. NOW, CHANCES ARE DC AND WARNER BROS HAVE MADE SURE THAT YOU'RE GETTING

caught up. Rumours had been swirling for a while about a film based on the villain team-up, but it seemed like the kind of idea that lots of people would express interest in but never make (*Sinister Six*, anyone?).

Then, David Ayer signed on in September. His star was higher than it's ever been, following the acclaimed *End Of Watch*, the gritty, gory *Sabotage*, and WW2 Brad Pitt vehicle *Fury*. *Fury* may not have received the Oscar recognition it wanted, and *Sabotage* may have flopped at the box-office, but Ayer had clout. When Warner Bros hired him to write and direct *Suicide Squad*, they made a statement. Here was a name.

It was also a great fit. Ayer loves antiheroes, and he loves them to come in teams. It doesn't seem like too much of a simplification to look at the collection of crooked adrenaline junkie DEA badasses in *Sabotage* or the bullish, broken antiheroes of *Fury* and see blueprints for *Suicide Squad*'s criminals and lunatics (Mireille Enos'

livewire liability in *Sabotage* has more than a bit of Harley Quinn about her). He's also a filmmaker who draws good actors to him, which would account for *Squad*'s starry cast.

Months after the big announcement, it's still a little surprising to see just how heavy the film is on star power. Admittedly, Joel Kinnaman (*RoboCop*) and Jai Courtney (*Terminator Genisys*) are still unproven box-office draws despite their heavy presence at the multiplex in the last couple of years, and Margot Robbie is still in need of her big A-list break-out following her scene-stealing turn in *The Wolf Of Wall Street*. The selection of a post-Oscar win Jared Leto as the Joker and box-office leviathan Will Smith as Deadshot speaks to an entirely different attitude to casting than we're seeing at Marvel. Warner Bros' president of creative development and worldwide production Greg Silverman told *The Hollywood Reporter* that the big name hunting also applies to their directors. "We have a great strategy for the DC films, which is to take these beloved characters and put them in the hands of master filmmakers."

"I don't think Marvel lacks for 'master filmmakers' or big names in their casts...

when it works," opines Blumberg. "There's something to be said for making stars out of superhero actors rather than casting stars; that way, you come to know the character as the character first, rather than seeing the famous face. You could argue that perhaps DC is going for names because it doesn't have confidence in its characters and stories, but I wouldn't go that far. Surely they know they have a rich history of fantastic adventures and incredible characters to draw from. And take a look at what is still considered the benchmark for superb superheroism in film – Christopher Reeve as Superman. He became a star, but he was virtually an unknown before that."

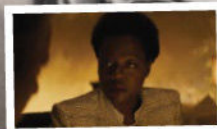
Suicide Squad is still a bit of a risk for DC. A superhero movie about villains hasn't been done before, but the payoff could be superb. The closest Marvel has come so far was *Guardians*' band of big-hearted outlaws; with *Suicide Squad*, DC could offer something completely different. "Some think a story focused on a villain can't work," Blumberg tells us. "The Joker had his own title, but it didn't last, and Dr Doom headlined a series for a short while alongside Sub-Mariner... It's true that it can be a challenge to find a sustaining story with a villain, but I just think it comes down to the quality of that story. Look at the first two *Godfather* movies... It can be done." ➤



"PERHAPS DC IS GOING FOR BIG NAME ACTORS BECAUSE IT DOESN'T HAVE CONFIDENCE IN ITS CHARACTERS"
ARNOLD T BLUMBERG



5 BEST MOMENTS FROM THE TRAILER



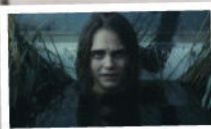
WHO'S THE BOSS

You need a special kind of badass to wrangle this deranged gang of lunatics and killers, and the great Viola Davis looks like she's sinking her teeth into the role of Amanda Waller like it's the steak she's eating. "Let's just say I put them in a hole and threw away the hole."



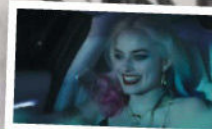
FINALLY, HARLEY

It's been a hell of a long time coming, but here's actual footage of Margot Robbie as Harley Quinn! Live action! She's looking more balletic and eerie than the livewire ball of energy we were expecting, but she's got the crazy eyes down. "Are you the devil?"



ROGUES' GALLERY

While the trailer's focus is on Harley and Will Smith's Deadshot, it's great to see some of the weirder characters. Top marks to Cara Delevingne's Enchantress weeping in a waterlogged grave and Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje's Killer Croc.



THE BATMAN, CONFIRMED

We knew it was coming thanks to all those helpful paparazzi pics, but it's an undeniable thrill to see the goddamn Batman clinging to the roof of the Joker and Harley's getaway car. "I hope you've got insurance," she cackles. Damn right.



HELLO, MR J

Well, looks like those tattoos were accurate. Preceded by a textbook cackle, it looks like we're seeing Joker in the middle of his 'treatment' of Dr. Harleen Quinzel. "I'm not going to kill you," he tells her. "I'm just going to hurt you really, really bad." The internet seems pleased.

These untested waters contain several characters who non-comics readers may not recognise: Deadshot, Rick Flag, Enchantress and Slipknot. A lot of what we've heard about the film could be interpreted as creative risk control. Will Smith in a comic-book movie? People will want to see that. Get Ben Affleck's Batman in for a cameo? Great, people always love Batman. Finally, giving us a big-screen Harley Quinn? It's about goddamn time, especially as she's been such an iconic part of the various *Batman* animated series and recent *Rocksteady* videogames, and early glimpses of Robbie in character look great.

The big one, however, is the Joker. From the very moment it was suggested that Mr J might be appearing in *Suicide Squad*, there was animated discussion. Fans cried that it was much too soon since Heath Ledger's iconic portrayal in *The Dark Knight*. Then there was the Leto Announcement. Never mind the fact that he'd just won the Academy Award for his performance in *Dallas Buyer's Club*, the news seemed to split fans right down the middle.

Then there was that photo. Covered in tattoos and sporting silver teeth, Leto screamed in the face of fandom, daring them to judge him. And they did. Forgetting the fact that there's a good chance the character won't be quite so tatted-up in the film (it was released as a celebration of 75 years of the character rather than an official press still), the world wasted no time in condemning his appearance as ridiculous. When you considered the reception when we finally saw him in the trailer, convincingly terrifying, yet markedly different from Heath Ledger's portrayal, and this attitude becomes even more so.

"People immediately label all such reactions as 'hate' or 'fanboy ranting,'" Blumberg tells us. "I do agree with many that say this seems to be a wrong-headed visual approach to the character, but with so many versions of the Joker already in existence and so many yet to come, surely we can see what this incarnation will offer. Time will tell if he's worthy of praise."

Arguably the most important thing to take away from that vision of Leto as the Joker is that we are still talking about it. We're still more than a year away from the release of *Suicide Squad*, and its progress is being tracked obsessively. The paparazzi released a barrage of pictures of Smith, Robbie and Leto shooting in the Toronto streets, and Ayer's tweet on 30 May announcing an end to exterior filming certainly had an element of relief to it, but also felt like it was urging the fans not to forget about his movie and everything we haven't seen. "Well, we survived the streets. Time to go dark now. Remember, only the tiniest glimpse has been exposed. Our surprises are intact." 🐸

Here comes the squad

Who is who in the Suicide Squad line-up?

Captain Boomerang

Played by: Jai Courtney
Created by: John Broome, Carmine Infantino
First appearance: *Flash* #117, 1960
Real name: George 'Digger' Harkness
Profession: Criminal
Speciality: Boomerang, being a jerk
Chance of survival: 10/1

Enchantress

Played by: Cara Delevingne
Created by: Bob Haney, Howard Purcell
First appearance: *Strange Adventures* #187, 1966
Real name: June Moone
Profession: Schizophrenic sorceress
Speciality: Various magicks
Chance of survival: 5/1

Slipknot

Played by: Adam Beach
Created by: Gerry Conway, Rafael Kayanan
First appearance: *Fury Of Firestorm* #28, 1984
Real name: Christopher Weiss
Profession: Assassin
Speciality: Ropes
Chance of survival: 25/1

Katana

Played by: Karen Fukuhara
Created by: Mike W Barr, Jim Aparo
First appearance: *The Brave And The Bold* #200, 1983
Real name: Tatsu Yamashiro
Profession: Samurai
Speciality: Martial arts, vengeance
Chance of survival: 15/1

Rick Flagg

Played by: Joel Kinnaman
Created by: Robert Kanigher, Ross Andru
First appearance: *Brave And The Bold* #25, 1959
Real name: Rick Flag Jr, possibly Anthony Miller
Profession: Soldier, government agent
Speciality: Leadership
Chance of survival: 4/1

Deadshot

Played by: Will Smith
Created by: Bob Kane, David Vern Reed, Lew Schwartz
First appearance: *Batman* #59, 1960
Real name: Floyd Lawton
Profession: Assassin
Speciality: Marksman, cybernetic eye
Chance of survival: 3/1

El Diablo

Played by: Jay Hernandez
Created by: Jai Nitz, Phil Hester
First appearance: *Suicide Squad Vol 4* #1
Real name: Chato Santana
Profession: Criminal
Speciality: Pyrokinesis
Chance of survival: 19/1

Killer Croc

Played by: Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje
Created by: Gerry Conway, Don Newton
First appearance: *Batman* #357, 1983
Real name: Waylon Jones
Profession: Criminal
Speciality: Incredible strength, reptile skin and teeth
Chance of survival: 13/1

Harley Quinn

Played by: Margot Robbie
Created by: Paul Dini, Bruce Timm
First appearance: *Batman The Animated Series*, 'Joker's Favor', 1992
Real name: Dr Harleen Quinzel
Profession: Criminal (former psychiatrist)
Speciality: Gymnastic hand-to-hand combat, lunacy
Chance of survival: 2/1

MEET...

HARLEY QUINN

Just who is the psychiatrist-turned-criminal?

Suicide Squad sees the big-screen debuts of several of the DC Universe's favourite bad guys, but we're very excited about one in particular: Dr Harleen Quinzel, aka Harley Quinn. It's been a hell of a long time coming for everyone's favourite lunatic-obsessed lunatic, who made her debut in *Batman: The Animated Series* to such a positive reaction that she crossed over to the comics, becoming one of the Caped Crusader's most iconic villains. Judging by Margot Robbie's portrayal of her in the *Suicide Squad* trailer – deceptively vulnerable, yet able to turn this on its head in an instant – she definitely seems to be channelling her spirit.

Harley has been a distinctive presence in various animated forms, most recently in the incredibly popular *Rocksteady* videogames, and now she's finally getting a big-screen incarnation. Her distinctive look and personality have made her a fan favourite since day one and, unsurprisingly, she's long been a favourite of cosplayers, including Ammie. "I've been a really big Harley Quinn fanatic for a long time, ever since the animated series!" she tells us. "I love the character, the design, the voice and the fact she believes herself to be so in love with the Joker and will do anything to make her puddin' smile, no matter what the cost. She is, of course, another female added to the line-up. There is always a shortage of female heroes/villains in comics!"

Over the years we've seen a whole range of different takes on the character, with several different incarnations of her costume and appearance. "As soon as I saw the *Arkham Knight* costume design for her I knew I had to have it!" enthuses Ammie. "I really liked the modesty involved with her latest design and going for a little less of a provocative appearance. I love her classic design the most; it is a true representation of a harlequin! I understand that they can't keep her in the same outfit forever."

As for whether we'll be seeing more and more Harley cosplayers in the near future, Ammie is in no doubt. "Absolutely!" she confirms. "I have already seen a huge increase in people cosplaying Harley just in the last five years. It always makes me wonder if Paul Dini and Bruce Timm knew how mega-popular this character would become. After all, she was only supposed to be a background henchwoman for the Joker. Look at how far she has come!"

HOW TO COSPLAY AS HARLEY QUINN

Cosplayer Ammie takes us through her Arkham Knight Harley Quinn costume...

The corset

I started off with the corset. I drafted the pattern placing the seam lines accurately to the artworks design. The corset is made of a high-quality faux leather fabric. I stitched the quilting pattern into it to be as accurate to Harley's as possible. I also added boning into all the seam channels of the corset for the structured look.

The skirt

I decided to go with a cotton fabric. I made three tiers of ruffles, gathering each one carefully and applying it to a base skirt. I added a white lace pre-gathered trim to the lower hem. I also added in a white crinoline petticoat under the skirt to give it the volume it required. The skirt is also fitted at the waist, and has an invisible zipper placed in the back seam.

The top

The top underneath the corset is a cotton fabric that has added bust cups sewn-in, made of red and navy vinyl. I custom-made the satin bias tape that encases the upper edges. The top has two collars. The top has a front zipper to make the garment easier to put on. I added balloon-style sleeves to create volume. I added spare straps around the sleeve band that encloses around a silver ring.

The straps

All the straps were made of the same faux leather, and I sewed red faux leather on the underside of straps to create the red trimming on both sides. She has three straps attached to the corset that go around her shoulders. There is another arm strap that goes around the arms and attaches to a metal ring in the back.

The bust straps were tricky to get accurate. The choker snaps in the back, but is still attached to the corset through the connecting straps that attach through the ring. The corset laces up in the back through eyelets I added.

The leggings and gauntlets

They are both made of spandex. I custom-dyed the red to be a darker shade to match the game version. I used navy in contrast to the red. The leggings were very simple to make. The hardest part was applying the diamonds on the thigh area and the silver diamonds on the knee area. I used the same red and navy vinyl I used for the bust cups. The silver diamonds were made of silver vinyl and appliquéd on like the larger diamonds.

The gauntlets were made like gloves with no hand section. I added two strips of spandex down each side and laced ribbon through each strip to give it a corset look. I used larger pre-gathered lace trim from the wrist ruffle.

THE FLASH

WHY LORD AND MILLER COULD BRING A SMILE TO THE GRITTY DC UNIVERSE

Stars Ezra Miller **Writer** Phil Lord and Chris Miller **Released** 23 March 2018

While *Wonder Woman* represents an opportunity for DC to make the crucial step of showing they know how to do a female-led superhero movie right, *The Flash* has an intriguing opportunity of its own. If early signs are to be believed, *The Flash* could be the film in which DC learns how to have fun – perhaps in a similar vein to The CW and Grant Gustin’s televised take on the character.

The casting of Ezra Miller is rather difficult to interpret beyond hiring a great actor. With sublime performances in *We Need To Talk About Kevin* and *The Perks Of Being A Wallflower*, Miller has shown he can be vulnerable, hilarious and terrifying, and everything in between. The biggest indicator as to tone is Warner Bros’ courting of current industry golden children Phil Lord and Chris Miller. The duo behind *21 Jump Street* and



The Lego Movie has had an incredible run of success. DC seemed like a slightly surprising fit given that much-rumoured ‘no jokes’ policy, but then that was a rumour that was aggressively debunked by industry insiders, including Seth Rogen, who pronounced it “bullshit.”

“They’ll have to fight it until a film – perhaps *The Flash* – shows they’re not going to resist adding a bit of levity to the proceedings,” opines Blumberg. “Marvel mixes comedy and drama... Life is a blend of all those things, why should DC superheroes always be scowling, never cracking a smile? That would make for a pretty sad cinema experience.”

At this point, Gal Gadot looks every inch the perfect Wonder Woman.



WONDER WOMAN

CAN DC GIVE US THE FIRST GREAT FEMALE SUPERHERO MOVIE?

Stars Gal Gadot **Writer** Jason Fuchs **Director** Patty Jenkins **Released** 23 June 2017

WE’RE KEEPING A VERY CLOSE EYE ON WONDER WOMAN. THE DC MOVIE UNIVERSE HAS BEEN SPOTTY IN TERMS OF ITS TREATMENT OF

female characters, so given that this is their first big-screen solo outing for one of the heroines since *Catwoman*, it’s fair to say we’ve been scrutinising it. The announcement that they were looking for a female director was promising, as was the hiring of Michelle MacLaren. We were concerned when MacLaren left the project, but the choice of *Monster* director Patty Jenkins seems like a strong one, with a certain amount of serendipity given her departure from Marvel’s *Thor* sequel.

But what can we expect? It’s the next in the line-up after *Suicide Squad*, but we’re unsure as to whether it will pick up after the events of *BVS*. It’s also the film before *Justice League Part One*, so it might set the stage for that movie... or not. Early reports suggest that comics staple Steve Trevor will feature, which could suggest an origin story... or not.

Whatever the story, *Wonder Woman* has a lot riding on it. There are those eager to prove that female-driven movies don’t make money, despite all evidence to the contrary, and *Wonder Woman* will be the first female superhero movie of our current age of comic-book movies. The naysayers can point at *Catwoman* and *Elektra*, but the rational fan community

can point out that those movies were beyond terrible, and would have been beyond terrible regardless.

Marvel’s first post-comic boom female superhero movie is coming in the form of *Captain Marvel*, but Carol Danvers’ solo adventure will be released about a year after. *Wonder Woman* represents an opportunity for DC to show they’re aware of the diversity of their fan base and that they know how to represent an iconic female character. The decision to pursue a female director would seem to suggest that the studio is listening to their fans.

“There are those that say it’s unwise to ever listen to fans when crafting a story, and there are those that insist they never do,” Blumberg tells us. “I doubt that’s entirely true, but in a case like this, where we’re talking about a great opportunity to bring new and diverse voices into the process, it’s not only a good thing to listen to all those saying it’s time more women and ethnicities were represented... it’s imperative. It’s way past time, so whether they’re doing it on their own or because they’re bowing to some sort of public pressure, this is a good direction.”

For her part, Gal Gadot seems to be embracing the challenge. Speaking at Comic-Con, she said, “I feel very privileged to be the one who’s going to bring her back to life, and I just can’t wait to celebrate this character.” Fingers crossed.

AQUAMAN

THE KING OF ATLANTIS IS HERE

Stars Jason Momoa **Writer** Kurt Johnstad **Director** James Wan **Released** 27 July 2018

The King of Atlantis is coming. If you want people to take Aquaman seriously, you cast Jason Momoa. One look at that picture of the *Game Of Thrones* star in full costume, and you’re left in no doubt about whether he could fit into the serious world that Snyder and Goyer have created.

“Absolutely, you have to make these characters work within the reality established by the films,” explains Blumberg. “You can’t easily have the guy with the skin-tight orange shirt and green tights walk onto the set next to Cavill’s dour Superman and Affleck’s even more perturbed Batman without looking like a fool. And while Aquaman hasn’t enjoyed quite the level of popularity as some of his colleagues, he’s had his moments and a few successful interpretations over the years. There’s plenty of room to make a version of Aquaman that fits within the universe DC is building on screen.”

Which is just as well, because his first big-screen appearance is drawing ever closer. Not only will he be appearing in *Batman V Superman*, but his solo movie is moving full-speed ahead at Warner Bros.



Intel on *Aquaman* is still limited.

Horror veteran James Wan will be the one giving the orders on *Aquaman*, having picked the Atlantean out of a sea of potential next movies following the incredible success of *Furious 7*. Wan has shown a great versatility throughout his career, and his love of movies shines prominently through in each of his films, and he’s now shown that incredible action set pieces are very much in his wheelhouse.

There’s no word yet on the supporting cast, or a plot. What is clear is that *Aquaman* is stepping further and further away from being a running joke and closer and closer to one of the most promising films on DC’s slate.



THE FUTURE OF MARVEL

WITH CIVIL WAR JUST AROUND THE CORNER, WE TAKE A LOOK
AT THE FUTURE OF MARVEL, FROM MCU PHASE
THREE TO FOX AND SONY'S NEXT FILMS

PLANNED UNTIL 2020

SUPERHERO MOVIES HAVE
TAKEN OVER THE CINEMAS
WITH 12 FILMS PLANNED IN THE
MCU (WITH MORE ADDED ALL
THE TIME!) AND AT LEAST A
FURTHER SEVEN MOVIES
FROM FOX AND SONY.
PHEW!

WHEN THE CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR TRAILER DROPPED, IT CAUSED THE USUAL SENSE OF MAYHEM. MARVEL FANS LOOKING FOR CLUES LEFT, RIGHT AND CENTRE, AND REVEALING MORE ABOUT THE FILM THAN WE'D MANAGED TO PIECE TOGETHER BEFORE.

Now we finally know what will spark the feud between the dear Captain and boisterous Tony Stark. William Hurt is back as General Thaddeus 'Thunderbolt' Ross, who we haven't seen since *The Incredible Hulk*, telling our heroes that whilst some people view them as heroes, others see them as vigilantes. It's a dirty word. And Stark rightfully points out that if they don't have rules, then it makes them no better than the bad guys they're fighting. In the *Civil War* comic book, Cap and Stark take opposing sides on the Superhero Registration Act, Cap, unsurprisingly, for freedom, whilst Stark sides with everybody having to register their name and identity. Their differing opinions come to blows and everybody is forced to take a side.

The other contributing factor is Bucky. Last seen at the end of the *Ant-Man* credits, he now seems to recall all the BFF details that he once knew about Steve from the first *Captain America* film. The government want him, he's a fugitive, and there is nothing Cap wouldn't do to keep him safe. This drives a wedge even further between Cap and Stark, who have been feuding since they first met.

And it's not just going to be Cap versus Iron Man, oh no, the trailer shows brothers-in-arms Cap and Bucky going at Stark at the same time. Ouch. No wonder he's sporting a shiner throughout most of the trailer.

Beyond those guys, *Civil War* will be filled with more superheroes in one place than you've ever seen in your entire life, outside of San Diego Comic-Con, of course. Seriously, it's going to be huge. The bill of heroes set to appear currently includes Captain America and Iron Man, plus Black Widow, The Winter Soldier, Falcon, Agent 13, War Machine, Hawkeye, Vision, Scarlet Witch, Ant-Man, Black Panther and Spider-Man. Phew. That's a lot of badass for one movie.

Besides the epic boss battle between Cap and Iron Man, we are most excited for are the new characters. First and foremost, *Captain America: Civil War* is going to feature Spider-Man's first ever venture into the MCU. That's some special stuff right there. After a tonne of rumours and fan-casting from almost everyone, Tom Holland (*How I Live Now*) finally got the coveted role in the summer of 2015. Spider-Man's as-yet untitled solo movie is a long way off (it's set for a July 2017 release date) but his early casting guaranteed we would see him, and although he is yet to been shown in any promotional material, he'll be in there somewhere! It will be nice to



slowly get to know Holland's take on Peter Parker as opposed to being thrown into the solo movie with a kid we don't really care about, sobbing over Uncle Ben. Again. Good call there, Marvel.

Joining Spider-Man as a brand new MCU hero is T'Challa, aka Black Panther (Chadwick Boseman). *Civil War* will be the character's first live action feature film appearance. We got a quick look at T'Challa's homeland of Wakanda in *Avengers: Age Of Ultron*, but we want more than that. The trailer showed Black Panther going at full throttle, into Bucky's face. But having the sense to run away from Cap.

The sides are as follows: Iron Man is leading Black Panther, Vision, Black Widow, and War Machine on the 'For The Superheroes Registration Act' side, while Captain America is leading a group made up of Hawkeye, Ant-Man, Agent 13, Falcon and The Winter Soldier on the 'For Freedom' side. Prior to the trailers release, Scarlet Witch had been ignored from any promo materials, but the trailer showed her siding with Captain America, which makes sense given how she feels about Stark. With no footage of Spider-Man swinging into action, we'll have to wait to find out whose side of the fight he is on.

It's hard not to get ridiculous excited about *Civil War*. The screenplay was written by Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely, the brilliant duo behind all the previous *Captain America* scripts, the *Thor: The Dark World* script and basically everything of *Agent Carter*; *The Winter Soldier*'s bro-directing team Anthony and Joe Russo have returned to direct this one as well, so really, there are no duds here. Just pure, unadulterated gold.

One major problem that we've noticed regarding the *Civil War* line-up is that there is an obvious, gaping hole where Thor and the Hulk should be. We're putting this down to Chris Hemsworth and Mark Ruffalo's availability. It would have been nice to get the whole team back together again for another showdown (and we'd be curious to see which sides they picked) but we guess you can't have everything all the time. Instead, we can look forward to seeing them both in *Thor: Ragnarok*, which Ruffalo himself has described it as a "buddy picture". On that summary alone, we are so there.



FOR REGISTRATION

Name: Tony Stark
Alias: Iron Man
Powers: Armour-assisted superhuman strength, durability and flight
Role: Leader
Reason: Stark is fighting for the initiation of the Superhero Registration Act. He's probably still feeling guilty about the mess he made with Ultron.

Name: Natasha Romanoff
Alias: Black Widow
Powers: Expert assassin, martial artist
Reason: Her previous liaisons with Rogers and Wilson mean it would make more sense for her to be on Cap's team, but she remains Government-loyal.

Name: Vision
Alias: Vision
Powers: Superhuman agility, intelligence, strength and speed, flight, density control, intangibility, shapeshifting, mass manipulation, regeneration, solar energy projection, technopathy
Reason: The fact that Vision started life as Stark's JARVIS. makes it obvious that Iron Man's team is where he belongs.

Name: James Rhodes
Alias: War Machine
Powers: Armour-assisted superhuman strength, durability and flight
Reason: Rhodes and Stark have been friends for a long time, so he remains faithful. Other superheroes seem to intimidate him a bit too.

Name: T'Challa
Alias: Black Panther
Powers: Superhuman senses, increased strength, speed, stamina, reflexes, agility
Reason: Who the heck knows? So far, we know nothing about the MCU version of Black Panther so we'll just have to wait and see.

FOR FREEDOM

Name: Sharon Carter
Alias: Agent 13
Powers: Skilled athlete and martial artist, highly trained in espionage, weaponry, computers
Reason: If MCU's Sharon Carter is indeed a relation of Peggy Carter, she could never have been on anyone's team but Captain America's.

Name: Sam Wilson
Alias: Falcon
Powers: Flight via wing harness, skilled martial artist and gymnast
Reason: Wilson stuck with Rogers through *The Winter Soldier* and *Age Of Ultron*, and it looks like he's going to stick around through *Civil War* too.

Name: Steve Rogers
Alias: Captain America
Powers: Superhuman strength, speed, agility and endurance
Role: Leader
Reason: Captain America stands for freedom above all things, and superheroes will never be free if the government has tabs on them.

Name: Scott Lang
Alias: Ant-Man
Powers: Size manipulation, telepathic insect communication, ability to enter the subatomic universe
Reason: Registering as a superhero doesn't really seem like something Lang would be into, so fighting against the Act is in his best interests.

Name: Clint Barton
Alias: Hawkeye
Powers: Master archer and marksman, expert tactician and martial artist
Reason: Barton most likely wants to stay off the Superhero Register so he can live his life in peace and keep his family safe. What a guy.

Name: Bucky Barnes
Alias: The Winter Soldier
Powers: Expert assassin, superhuman strength, enhanced reaction time, energy projection
Reason: Barnes and Rogers were the best of friends during the First World War, and it looks like Barnes is finally coming back round to that.

CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR TRAILER BREAKDOWN

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE HEROES RUN OUT OF BAD GUYS TO FIGHT? IF CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR IS ANYTHING TO GO BY, THEY TURN ON EACH OTHER, THAT'S WHAT. WE BREAK DOWN THE TRAILER FOR CAP AND IRON MAN'S SUPERHERO SMACKDOWN...

"THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN SOME FORM OF TENSION BETWEEN TONY AND STEVE, AND IT LOOKS LIKE IT WILL FINALLY COME TO A HEAD HERE"



Tripping down memory lane

"Buck, do you remember me?" The trailer starts where we left off in the post-credits scene for *Ant-Man*, with Bucky having been brought in by Cap and Sam 'Falcon' Wilson. But what state of mind is he in?



Widow's mercy

"I know how much Bucky means to you. Stay out of this one, please. You'll only make this worse," warns Natasha, who having fought by his side for a while now, finds herself opposed to Cap.



Tony gets stark

"Sometimes I want to punch you in your perfect teeth." There has always been some form of tension between Tony and Steve, and it looks like it will finally come to a head here.



Flight of the Falcon

"When people shoot at you they usually wind up shooting at me too." Falcon can clearly handle himself, but it looks like his support for Cap might not be as unwavering as it was previously.



Not so fast

We know Cap's strong, but here he's just taking the Michael, somehow managing to stop a whole bloody helicopter from flying away with just his bare hands. He clearly eats his greens.



Raiding the arc

Bucky and Iron Man face off, with Bucky going for the Arc Reactor in Tony's chest. That's either a very smart or very dumb move, as we doubt Tony would leave his main source of power so unprotected.



Man down?

Rhodey looks like he's in a bad way. We doubt he's actually dead, as that would be a huge spoiler. But it would almost certainly be enough motivation to persuade Tony to up the ante.



Your mum

"Your mum's name was Sarah. You used to wear newspaper in your shoes." Judging by his in-depth Cap knowledge, it looks like Bucky has recovered (at least partially) from his brainwashing. Happy Cap.



Run Bucky run!

However, judging their curtailed conversation, it looks like Bucky has been framed for some destructive event, promptly forcing him to leg it from none-too-friendly pursuing forces. Sad Cap.



Paper talk

The *Civil War* storyline in the comics introduced the Superhero Registration Act – here known as the 'Sokovia Accords' after the town that was levelled in *Age Of Ultron*. Guess that didn't go unnoticed.



Heroes assemble

Cap's team assemble, giving us our first look at Hawkeye and Scarlet Witch in the mix. Wanda's inclusion makes sense considering her previous beef with Tony, although Clint's less so.



The first panther

T'Challa, aka Black Panther, the ruler of Wakanda (the place all the vibranium came from in *Age Of Ultron*) gets his close up. Siding with the Pro-Registration forces, he looks suitably menacing.



Let the battle commence

"We fight!" Cap and co charge head-on, with Scarlet Witch displaying a cool new use of her powers. We're going to assume that Ant-Man is clinging on to someone's shoulder somewhere in the shot.



Parting of the ways

"Sorry Tony, you know I wouldn't do this if I had any other choice. But he's my friend." Everyone's loyalties are being challenged in *Civil War*, and Cap's facing the hardest decision of all.



There will be tears

"So was I." Aw. Despite having taken a beating, this is a situation nobody is enjoying. Surely this won't break their relationship beyond repair? We hope not. There's still the little matter of fighting Thanos.



Iron wham

Things don't look good here, with Bucky and Cap trading the shield to give Tony an up-close pummelling, in an as-yet unnamed snowy location. We can't wait.

DOCTOR STRANGE



Here's all we know so far about the Sorcerer Supreme's solo movie: Scott Derrickson (*Sinister*) is directing it; Joshua Oppenheimer, Thomas Dean Donnelly (both of *Sahara* fame) and Jon Spaihts (*Prometheus*) are penning the screenplay, and the cast is filled with chiselled cheekboned wonders. Seriously, Benedict Cumberbatch as Dr Stephen Strange? Yes, please. Chiwetel Ejiofor as Baron Mordo? Go on then. Tilda Swinton as the Ancient One? Love it. The white washing of the character – who was originally Tibetan in the comics – is a genuine shame, but the gender swapping will be an interesting route to journey down. Swinton has also stated that she hasn't yet decided if she's going to play

the Ancient One as a man or a woman – intriguing stuff.

Rachel McAdams (*Mean Girls*, *True Detective*) rounds off the confirmed stars, though it's not yet clear what role she'll be taking on. As far as rumoured cast members go, apparently, Marvel has its eye on the Mads Mikkelsen for another supervillain. He was deliciously devilish in *Hannibal*; we can only imagine what he'd do in *Doctor Strange*.

Not much else has happened with the movie (filming has been going on for a short while at time of going to press), but fans were given a peek at concept art during D23. The images haven't been released publicly, but from the Twitter reactions they were pretty breathtaking.

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL 2

Ooga-chaking its way onto cinema screens in 2017, the sequel to Marvel's risk that paid off (big time) will look to deliver the same retro-fuelled excess and comedy one-upmanship that helped make *Guardians Of The Galaxy* such a hit.

Although concrete details are thin on the ground at present, returning director

James Gunn has confirmed that a large part of the story will focus on Peter Quill (Chris Pratt)'s relationship with his absent father (who was hinted to be a pretty formidable figure at the climax to the previous movie), saying in an interview with IGN, "It's not about the revelation of who it is; it's about what his relationship is to that character." Taking this statement at face value, it seems likely that the movie will deviate from the comics – we wouldn't be surprised if his father has a different identity altogether.

Apart from that, we can possibly expect the addition of a new Guardian to keep things fresh. Cosmic figurehead Adam Warlock is one candidate, especially considering his presence in easter egg form in the background of the Collector's menagerie in the original film, while other rumours peg ROM the Spaceknight, who Gunn bigged up as one of his favourite characters on Twitter.

In addition to the Guardians themselves, supporting cast members Michael Rooker, Karen Gillan and Benicio del Toro are all set to be returning as Yondu, Nebula and the Collector respectively, while Pom Klementieff has been cast as Mantis, a former member of the Avengers in the comics.



ANT-MAN AND THE WASP



This was a bit of a sneak attack one. After the first *Ant-Man* solo film did a lot better than many of us thought it would, we all knew a sequel was an inevitability. What we didn't know, however, was that Hope Van Dyne (Evangeline Lilly)'s future superhero alter ego would be upgraded to equal status on the film-naming front. We already saw her Wasp suit in *Ant-Man*'s mid-credits sting so it's extremely likely Hank Pym (Michael Douglas) will finally let his daughter go out in the field and fight – and we mean *really* fight – this time with his protégé Scott Lang (Paul Rudd). But just how much screen time will the Wasp get in the film? We're hoping for lots, because there's so much that could be done with

this character, and there's just so much we want to see.

Like with *Doctor Strange*, we don't know much else about the film itself at this point. *Ant-Man* director Peyton Reed is staying on to helm the project, but there's still no word about who will be writing it. After the whole Edgar Wright fiasco with the first film, we're expecting Marvel to mull it over for a while.

The news of *Ant-Man And The Wasp* came later than the rest of Phase Three so it had to be slotted into the schedule, set for release on 6 July 2018. As a result *Black Panther* has been moved up from that date to 16 February 2018, whereas *Captain Marvel* has been pushed back from 2 November 2018 to 8 March 2019.



BLACK PANTHER

Long in the making, since the unveiling of Chadwick Boseman as the titular T'Challa, king of Wakanda in 2014, progress has appeared to be relatively slow of late. *Selma* director Ava DuVernay turned down the chance to helm the MCU's first movie featuring a black character in the title role, and while of late Ryan Coogler (*Creed*, *Fruitvale Station*)

has been linked to the big seat, nothing has been confirmed yet.

With Boseman due to make his first MCU appearance in the upcoming *Captain America: Civil War*, it's likely that we'll learn more about him there, although considering that the trailer and promotional images showed him siding with Tony Stark and co against Captain America's team for the pro-superhero registration side, it's possible that we'll see a more authoritarian and ruthless character than we're used to from the comics. Then again, maybe he's just a young ruler thinking in the best interests of his people – could go either way!

In the meantime, *Amber Lake* writer/director Joe Robert Cole (who was also given script responsibilities for *Inhumans*) has been put in charge of writing the screenplay, while Andy Serkis's Ulysses Klaw (an enemy of the Panther in the comics) is heavily rumoured to be reprising his role from *Avengers: Age Of Ultron*, presumably sporting a mechanical arm like his comic-book counterpart to replace the one that Ultron sliced off.

Still, with the film not due out until February 2018, a lot could happen in the meantime, and we're sure that Marvel will go big (without going home) on the promotional campaign for this one.

AVENGERS: INFINITY WAR

We've seen some of the Infinity Gems, but there are still two to be found



Everything has been building up to this. Due to be released in two parts in 2018 and 2019 (and put together by the *Captain America: Winter Soldier* behind-the-scenes team of directors Anthony and Joe Russo and writers Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely), we're expecting pretty much the entire MCU to come together to take on Thanos, who was shown to be finally stepping out from

behind the veil in *Age Of Ultron*'s post-credits scene, ready to take matters into his own hands, Infinity Gauntlet at the ready.

Having very much been a background presence so far (smirking at the end of *Avengers Assemble*, hovering in his space chair while chastising Roman in *Guardians Of The Galaxy* and his aforementioned *Age Of Ultron* cameo), we're sure he'll be a formidable presence, especially

considering his actions in the comics when armed with the Gauntlet, choosing to wipe out half the universe with just a simple gesture.

So far we've seen four of the six Infinity Gems that give the Gauntlet its power: the Space Stone (Tesseract, first seen in *Captain America: The First Avenger*), the Mind Stone (originally powered Loki's sceptre in *Avengers Assemble*), the Reality

Stone (the Aether than caused havoc in *Thor: The Dark World*) and the Power Stone (which tore the Collector's lab apart in *Guardians Of The Galaxy*). Currently they're all scattered around the MCU – one's even in Vision's head, which doesn't exactly bode well for him – meaning the *Infinity War* films will take place on a scale the likes of which we haven't seen before.

As for the Avengers themselves – well, the identities of the line-up won't be clear for a while. The events of *Age Of Ultron* saw Iron Man, Thor, Hulk and Hawkeye leave the team, but with all of them confirmed to show up again in one form or another, in addition to the aftermath of *Civil War* remaining unclear, it's likely that even more changes to the team are on the cards, especially with the likelihood that Doctor Strange, Captain Marvel and Spider-Man will all show up at some point too. If you thought that some of Marvel's earlier movies were crowded then you've seen nothing yet.

Although there's still a lot to happen in between now and *Infinity War Part 1*, that hasn't stopped the rumours flying through the gate: apparently more than one main character will meet their end (Cap, Iron Man, Thor and Hawkeye are all candidates, with their actors all due to reach their end of their contracts), and that Loki will return to side with Thanos, at least initially. Whatever happens, it's safe to say that Marvel has laid some pretty serious groundwork in making this at least as epic as DC's *Justice League* movies. Game on.

“IN THE AFTERMATH OF CIVIL WAR, IT'S LIKELY THAT EVEN MORE CHANGES TO THE TEAM ARE ON THE CARDS, ESPECIALLY WITH THE LIKELIHOOD THAT DOCTOR STRANGE, CAPTAIN MARVEL AND SPIDER-MAN WILL ALL SHOW UP AT SOME POINT”

THOR: RAGNAROK

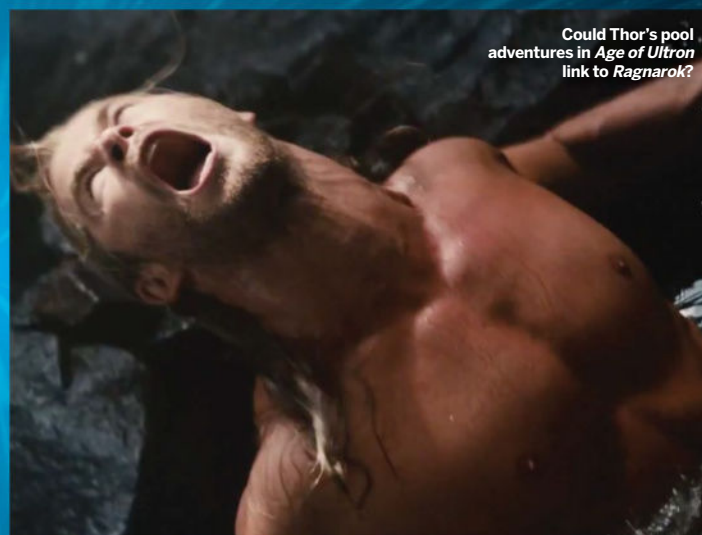
The third and presumably final film in the *Thor* trilogy, this has quickly morphed into one of the Marvel films we're most excited about thanks to a series of inspired cast and crew choices.

First up is the confirmation that Mark Ruffalo will reprise his role as Bruce Banner, aka the Hulk, in what promises to be one of the most epic Marvel movies to date. The title refers to the 'Ragnarok' storyline in the comics, in which Thor allows Asgard to be destroyed and reborn anew, leading to his own absence (for a while, at least). Coupled with Thor's Scarlet Witch-induced apocalyptic visions in *Age Of Ultron*, and the likelihood that Banner's presence will mean that elements of the popular 'Planet Hulk'

storyline are included, and the excitement metre will have officially reached fever pitch.

Even better is the identity of the director: Taika Waititi, helmer of the brilliant vampire-comedy *What We Do In The Shadows* and *Flight Of The Conchords* mainstay. *Ragnarok* will be unlike anything he's ever done before, and as such we're sure as hell can't wait to find out.

In fact, there are a myriad directions this could go. We can't imagine Asgard will be in the best of states, with Thor having unwittingly left it in the hands of Loki. Also, with the title hinting at Thor's own potential demise, could Jane Foster (Natalie Portman) take on the God of Thunder mantle, as she has in the comics recently? Stranger things have happened.



Could Thor's pool adventures in *Age of Ultron* link to *Ragnarok*?

CAPTAIN MARVEL



Who will play her?
A newcomer or a
popular starlet?

SPIDERMAN

The movie that Marvel fans have been crying out for is finally happening. After his introduction in *Captain America: Civil War*, the wall-crawler will get his own movie as Sony and Marvel Studios let bygones be bygones and deliver the prospect of Spidey rubbing shoulders with Cap, Iron Man et al.

Directed by *Cop Car's* Jon Watts and penned by *Vacation* and *Horrible Bosses 2* writers Jon Francis Daley and Jonathan M Goldstein, the new *Spider-Man* is due out in July 2017, and sees actual teenager Tom Holland stepping into Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield's well-worn spandex in this younger take on Peter Parker. As if to hammer home the fact that this is a much younger Spidey than we're used to seeing, the 51-year-old (although she looks

nowhere near that age) Marisa Tomei has been cast in the role of Aunt May. Marvel seems determined to set this as far apart from previous incarnations as possible.

The likelihood is that this will depict a Spider-Man at the very beginning of his career, just discovering his powers, with producer Kevin Feige describing this as having more of a "John Hughes" vibe (teen coming-of-ager *The Breakfast Club*, to be precise), going so far as to call it "a soap opera in high school". Even more excitingly, he has teased the prospect of a new villain that we haven't seen on screen in the form of the various film versions before – although after its inevitable success, we're sure we'll see the likes of Green Goblin and Venom turn up again in future instalments.

Captain Marvel can be considered one of the big ones: this is because it will be Marvel Studios' first ever film with a female-only lead. The first. Ever. By the time it comes out we'll be in 2019. What have you been playing at, Marvel? Kevin Feige, what do you have to say for yourself? There's not really any excuse.

When the release date was pushed back the first time (it was originally slated for a 6 July 2018 release) it was to squeeze in *Spider-Man*, a hero we've probably seen more of than any other. The second time it was pushed back was for *Ant-Man And The Wasp*. Marvel.com tried to reassure fans that they weren't favouring the male-led stories by saying that "the sequel will make the first Marvel Studios film named

Talent signed onto the project so far include Mag LeFauve and Nicole Perlman, both of whom are teaming up to write the screenplay. This was a promising first step: LeFauve previously worked on *Inside Out's* script while Perlman got an early credit for *Guardians Of The Galaxy*. If you've seen either of those titles, you'll most likely agree that they were both bitchin'. However, a director is yet to step forward and take on the task. This is probably a case of Wonder Woman Syndrome: no one was willing to step up to that plate at first either. The fact of the matter is that *Captain Marvel* has more to lose if it fails compared to previous superhero films: the reason for flopping will be put down to the protagonist being a woman, and Marvel

"THE FACT OF THE MATTER IS THAT CAPTAIN MARVEL HAS MORE TO LOSE IF IT FAILS COMPARED TO PREVIOUS SUPERHERO FILMS"

after its heroine". It's not really, though, is it? It's barely an equal billing. What was wrong with *Captain Marvel* being the first, eh?

Everyone knows that superhero movies in general have a bad track record with how they treat female characters, so there's a lot resting on *Captain Marvel* to get it right. It's not that Marvel hates women as such. If Marvel were a singular person it would be less of a feminist scholar and more of a year eight boy at a school disco; it appreciates that women exist and wants to have them around, but once there are actual women standing in front of it, it doesn't quite know how to treat them.

will be discouraged from trying it again. It's a real shame if this does happen, but it's how these things work.

The star of the film, *Captain Marvel* herself, is also yet to be confirmed. Popular rumours have so far included Olivia Wilde, Ronda Rousey and Rebecca Ferguson. Our personal wish list of leading ladies consists of Katee Sackhoff, Yvonne Strahovski, Elizabeth Banks and Aubrey Plaza. The incarnation of Captain Marvel is set to be Carol Danvers for this story. In the comics, she's a white woman with blonde hair and blue eyes, but we see no reason why Marvel can't shake it up a little with the casting. Can you even *imagine* how great Plaza would be? Exactly.



X-MEN: APOCALYPSE



After the glorious meeting of old and new that was *X-Men: Days Of Future Past*, the question was posed of exactly how the follow-up could possibly be any more epic. As it turned out, the conundrum was resolved emphatically during its own post-credits sequence, with the reveal that Apocalypse, one of the most powerful X-Men villains of all, would show up to cause problems for not only Xavier and his team, but also for the whole world.

In the comics, Apocalypse is an ancient and near-unstoppable mutant who works pretty closely to the 'survival of the fittest maxim'. Judging by the official synopsis for *X-Men: Apocalypse*, it will be a similar case here, with the titular terror (played by Oscar Isaac) awakening from a millennia-long sleep to amass various mutants to his cause, such as a disillusioned Magneto (Michael Fassbender), the telekinetic Psylocke (Olivia Munn) a young Storm (Alexandra Shipp) and winged-wonder Angel (Ben Hardy), inevitably crossing paths with the X-Men, led by Charles Xavier (James McAvoy) and Mystique (Jennifer Lawrence).

Despite this being billed as the final part of a trilogy, the focus is very much on the future, with some of the older characters being replaced by young actors. In addition to Shipp, *Game Of Thrones* star Sophie Turner will play Jean Grey, with Tye Sheridan on board as Cyclops, *Let Me In* and *The Road* star Kodi Smit-McPhee bamfing in as Nightcrawler and Lana Condor causing fireworks as Jubilee. Returning faces include Beast (Nicholas Hoult), Moira MacTaggart (Rose Byrne), William Stryker (Josh Helman) and Havok (Lucas Till), with first-time appearances in store for mutant tracker Caliban (Tomas Lemarquis) and Plague (Rochelle Okoye).

Most excitingly, having won plaudits for his performance in *Days Of Future Past*, Evan Peters will race again as the lightning-fast Quicksilver, likely with more screen time, with his relationship with his father being teased – for those who haven't read the comics we'll neglect to mention here exactly who his parent is. Judging by the photo of him alongside Lawrence's Mystique in X-Men garb, he'll quit thrill-seeking and become a fully paid-up member of the world's foremost X-team.

With director Bryan Singer being pretty active on Twitter during the production process, his account has yielded a number of sneak peeks at the film. Caliban's presence has necessitated the construction of a set for the Morlock tunnels ('Morlocks' being a group of mutants who can't pass for normal humans due to their visible mutations, so live in the sewers of New York as a place of refuge), art showing Angel in a cage while being ogled at by an audience, and a newly cleaned up Cerebro in action. There has even been concept art released depicting Apocalypse's ship, which looks as grandiose as you would expect from the world's most powerful mutant.

Speaking of Singer, his presence at the helm seems rather fitting: he was there at the beginning, and now he will be there to round off this particular trilogy in style, all the while laying fertile ground for a new era of X-movies. Indeed, he has gone so far as to describe it as the beginning of a new era for the "true X-men": bringing the original favourites back together after some of them – Cyclops, most notably – was so misused the first time round (thanks a lot, Brett Ratner).

In fact, the only missing piece of the puzzle is Wolverine. His third - and probably final - solo movie is due out in 2017, which will apparently be Hugh Jackman's last appearance, with no word on whether he'll show up in *Apocalypse*. Surely there won't be an *X-Men* without Logan, right?

**"EVAN PETERS WILL
RACE AGAIN AS THE
LIGHTNING-FAST
QUICKSILVER"**



Ben Hardy will be taking over the role of Angel from Ben Foster.



INHUMANS

Being Inhuman:
Will the cast of
SHIELD appear?

A bit of a blank slate, this one. *Inhumans* is currently down for a 2019 release date, but since no director, writing team or cast has been attached at the time of writing, its status seems to be in more than a little doubt. Recent unsubstantiated rumours that Marvel were planning to scrap the movie altogether haven't exactly inspired confidence that this will eventually see the light of the day, not to mention other projects like *Ant-Man And The Wasp* leap-frogging ahead of it in the scheduling queue.

With *Marvel's Agents Of SHIELD* having heavily featured the Inhumans in its storylines of late, many have posited the possibility of the Kree descendants' movie spinning out of the show. However, since none of the iconic characters from the comics have showed up in the TV show yet (the mute king Black Bolt, his wife Medusa and the element-commanding Crystal), we can see Marvel looking beyond the show and putting their own big-budget spin on proceedings. With the X-Men currently locked away under Fox's banner, they represent the Marvel Cinematic Universe's best chance to emulate the Children of the Atom's dynamic, and it's likely that they'll take their sweet time to do so.

In the meantime, Marvel continues to push the Moon-dwellers heavily in the comics, with the *Uncanny Inhumans* comic due to launch as part of the line-wide All-New, All-Different Marvel relaunch, and Karnak poised to get his own series. News may be thin on the ground at present, but *Inhumans* definitely isn't dead yet. Not by a long shot.

X-MEN: APOCALYPSE TRAILER BREAKDOWN

IF YOU THOUGHT THE STAKES COULDN'T BE HIGHER AFTER DAYS OF FUTURE PAST THEN THINK AGAIN, AS X-MEN: APOCALYPSE SEES THE TITULAR TERROR (OSCAR ISAAC) BRING ABOUT HIS PLAN FOR WORLD DOMINATION. HERE'S WHAT'S IN STORE...

"SOME CHARACTERS WHO GOT SHORT-CHANGED IN PREVIOUS X-MEN MOVIES ARE GETTING REIMAGINED HERE. ONE IS ARCHANGEL"



Night terrors

"I saw the end of the world. I could feel all this death." The young Jean Grey (Sophie Turner) has a premonition. Despite Charles' reassurance that it's just a dream, we suspect differently.



Apocalypse now

Turns out he wasn't wrong, as the baddie proceeds to invade the mansion with Horsemen, Storm, Archangel, Psylocke and Magneto, the latter of which seems to have had a power upgrade.



Quoth Raven, "Nevermore"

Despite having parted on less than friendly terms in *Days Of Future Past*, Mystique is back on the scene, agreeing to former lover Beast's notion that the world needs the X-Men. Now it's a fight.



X-Men assemble

Mystique, Beast and the returning Moira MacTaggart board the Blackbird alongside new recruits Jean, Cyclops and Quicksilver. Judging by the fact that their suited, we're sure their mission's not friendly.



Dark angel

Some characters who got short-changed in previous *X-Men* movies are getting reimaged. One is Archangel, who judging by this will be more memorable than he was in *X-Men: The Last Stand*.



Stormy weather

Traditionally one of the good guys, the young Storm (Alexandra Shipp) shows what she can do with all the elements at her command. While we're sure she won't stay a baddie, in the meantime she's a threat.



Bang goes the mansion

In the comics it seems like the X-mansion gets destroyed pretty much every other week, and it looks like the same thing's happening here. We're going to assume that Apocalypse is responsible



Jubilation time

"You are all my children. And you're lost." As Apocalypse states his plan, we get a look at some of the new characters, like Jubilee (Lana Condor, above) and Nightcrawler (Kodi Smit-McPhee).



Light at the end of the tunnel

"You follow blind leaders." As someone works their way through a claustrophobic-looking tunnel, Apocalypse continues to lecture about mutantkind's failings, with Professor X firmly in his crosshairs.



Cerebro's bad news

Having already established that he's a bad egg who inspired the worst bits in the Bible, Charles uses Cerebro to delve into Apocalypse's mind. Judging by his reaction, what he finds isn't too promising.



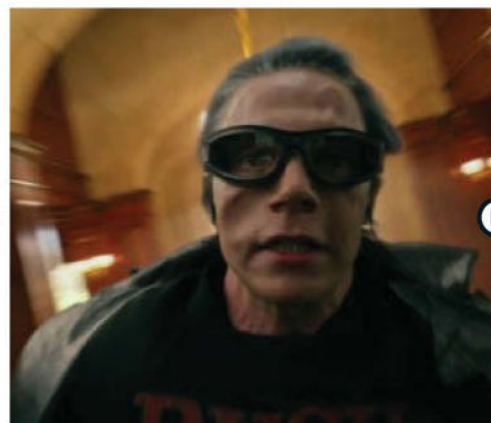
Mad Magnus

Having apparently fallen on hard times, Magneto is one of the first to take up Apocalypse's cause. However, he's never been an out and out bad guy, and we're sure there will be similar conflicts here.



Size matters

Apocalypse isn't just talk; here, he shows he isn't afraid to get his hands dirty – which is just as well, as that's exactly what will happen if he keeps pressing the unfortunate Quicksilver into the floor.



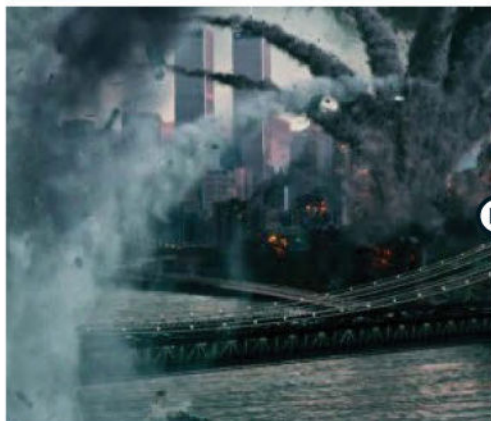
Need for speed

Speaking of Quicksilver, the super-fast mutant looks to be a bigger part this time after being one of the unexpected highlights of the previous film. From what we've heard, we'll learn a lot more about him.



Monologue time

"From the ashes of their old world, we'll build a better one!" Speaking of the blue baddie, here he is in his full glory, outlining his pretty straightforward plans for world conquest and domination.



The end is nigh

As if to illustrate what he means (even though he really doesn't need to; the clue's in the name), he sets about causing destruction on a frankly apocalyptic scale. See what we did there?



Hair today, gone tomorrow

Apparently the stress has caused Charles to lose his hair – literally, as the opening doors reveal his newly bald bonce, and moving him even further along the journey of his evolution into Patrick Stewart.

1938
to 1988

THE GOLDEN AGE OF SUPERHERO MOVIES

The few and the proud as the genre is born with the ka-pows! and innuendo of Adam West's Batman and the warm smile and soaring theme of Christopher Reeve's Superman and the bottle city of sequels that following them...

THE SPIDER'S WEB

DIRECTOR: James W Horne, Ray Taylor
CAST: Warren Hull, Iris Meredith, Richard Fiske

RELEASED: 22 October 1938

Released just as *Green Hornet* hit the radio and *Superman* hit the newsstands, The Spider may be a stock masked gangbuster (albeit a faintly sinister one) but his debut serial opened the door for superheroes on the flickering canvas.

VERDICT ★★☆☆

THE GREEN HORNET

DIRECTOR: Ford Beebe, Ray Taylor
CAST: Gordon Jones, Wade Boteler, Keye Luke

RELEASED: 9 January 1940

Following up on the character's radio success, this 13-parter is a pretty standard fisticuffs mystery, most remarkable for starring a young Keye Luke (Kung Fu's Master Po) as Kato.

VERDICT ★★☆☆

MYSTERIOUS DOCTOR SATAN

DIRECTOR: John English, William Witney
CAST: Eduardo Ciannelli, Robert Wilcox, William Newell

RELEASED: 13 December 1940

What a name for a villain, eh? No wonder square-jawed do-gooder The Copperhead barely gets a look-in as Eduardo Ciannelli swallows scenery in this game-changing serial from Republic - the moment the cowboy became the caped crusader.

VERDICT ★★☆☆

ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN MARVEL

DIRECTOR: John English, William Witney
CAST: Tom Tyler, Frank Coghlan Jr, William 'Billy' Benedict

RELEASED: 28 March 1941

Beating his arch-rival Superman to the big screen by seven years, this 12-part movie serial - each one with a doozy of a cliffhanger - is a classic wide-eyed adventure with superb visual effects and camp melodrama.

VERDICT ★★★★★

SPY SMASHER

DIRECTOR: William Witney
CAST: Kane Richmond, Marguerite Chapman, Sam Flint

RELEASED: 4 April 1942

Despite its roots in a relatively unknown Fawcett comics, *Spy Smasher* has one of the tautest scripts in the history of the superhero serial, lighting the fuse on a action-packed tale of covert daring do that remands a First Avenger-style remake.

VERDICT ★★★★★

BATMAN

DIRECTOR: Lambert Hillyer
CAST: Lewis Wilson, Douglas Croft, J Carrol Naish

RELEASED: 16 July 1943

The Caped Crusader is a pistol-packing government spy-catcher dispensing racist barbs as he cold-clocks Tojo's henchmen, but despite its wartime jingoism and farcical production, this 15-part serial's influence of Batman lore is surprising.

VERDICT ★★★★★

THE MASKED MARVEL

DIRECTOR: Spencer Gordon Bennet
CAST: William Forrest, Louise Currie, Johnny Arthur

RELEASED: 6 November 1943

Gloriously shot mixture of pulp detective/secret agent and masked mystery man, the *Masked Marvel* gets the most out of its hero's secret identity - preserving the mystery until the final reel.

VERDICT ★★★★★

THE PHANTOM

DIRECTOR: B Reeves Eason
CAST: Tom Tyler, Jeanne Bates, Ernie Adams

RELEASED: 24 December 1943

Captain Marvel star Tom Tyley embodies the Ghost Who Walks, while not as wildly over the top, *The Phantom* is deeply enjoyable - even his canine sidekick Devil can't seem to stop wagging his tail at inopportune moments.

VERDICT ★★★★★

CAPTAIN AMERICA

DIRECTOR: Elmer Clifton, John English
CAST: Dick Purcell, Lorna Gray, Lionel Atwill
RELEASED: 5 February 1944

Marvel's first big screen outing turns the Sentinel of Liberty into a chubby district attorney with nary a shield in sight, but as if to prove those things don't really matter - it's one of Republic's best action/adventure serials.

VERDICT ★★★★★

SUPERMAN

DIRECTOR: Spencer Gordon Bennet, Thomas Carr
CAST: Kirk Alyn, Noel Neill, Tommy Bond

RELEASED: 15 July 1948

Substituting difficult FX sequences for animation is the masterstroke that gives *Superman* a distinct identity amid the explosion in superhero serials,

VERDICT ★★★★★

BATMAN AND ROBIN

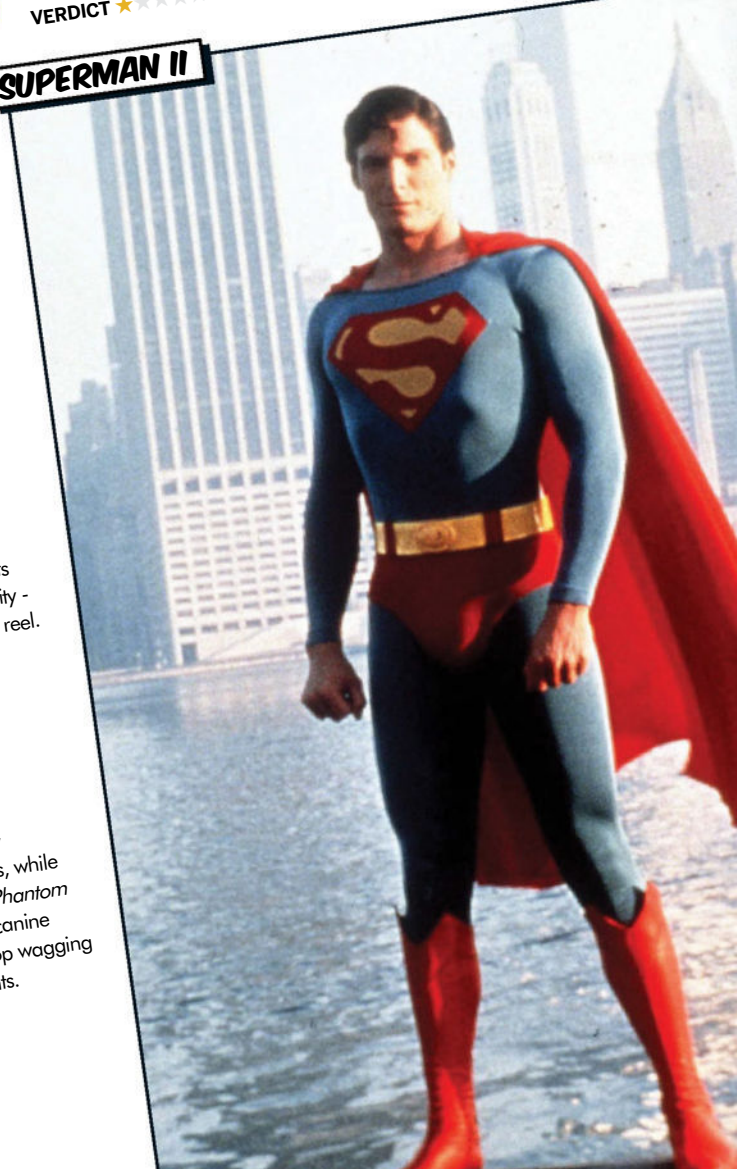
DIRECTOR: Spencer Gordon Bennet
CAST: Robert Lowery, Johnny Duncan, Jane Adams

RELEASED: 26 May 1949

The end of the war saps the Yellow Peril bigotry from the Dark Knight, but the crappiness and the plot-holes remain. What *Batman '66* did with a smirk, *Batman And Robin* does with bullish sincerity.

VERDICT ★★☆☆

SUPERMAN II





BATMAN

ATOM MAN VS SUPERMAN

DIRECTOR: Spencer Gordon Bennet
CAST: Kirk Alyn, Noel Neill, Lyle Talbot
RELEASED: 20 July 1950

- Cheap and gimmicky, *Atom Man Vs Superman* leaps from low-budget set-piece to low budget set-piece, while Ed Wood-grade flying saucers bob around lazily.

VERDICT ★★★★★

SUPERMAN AND THE MOLE MEN

DIRECTOR: Lee Sholem
CAST: George Reeves, Phyllis Coates, Jeff Corey
RELEASED: 23 November 1951

- Though this first full-length superhero movie served primarily as an accidental pilot for George Reeves' *Adventures Of Superman* TV show, its progressive themes and charismatic lead pack a punch of its own worth of its solar-powered protagonist.

VERDICT ★★★★★

FEATURED: PAGE 36 BATMAN: THE MOVIE

DIRECTOR: Leslie H Martinson
CAST: Adam West, Burt Ward, Lee Meriwether
RELEASED: 30 July 1966

- With *Batmania* exploding like a lava lamp at altitude, *Batman: The Movie* transposed the stylish snigger-fest to the big screen, bringing together the show's most iconic villains for an endlessly quotable and surprisingly smart triumph.

VERDICT ★★★★★

FEATURED: PAGE 40 SUPERMAN

DIRECTOR: Richard Donner
CAST: Christopher Reeve, Margot Kidder, Gene Hackman
RELEASED: 10 December 1978

- The superhero arrives with all the sense of wonder transposed from the page to the screen. Christopher Reeve is perfect, his physical transformation from Clark to Kal so convincing that we'll take the lame disguise and contrived disappearances. Cinema magic.

VERDICT ★★★★★

FEATURED: PAGE 44 SUPERMAN II

DIRECTOR: Richard Lester
CAST: Gene Hackman, Christopher Reeve, Margot Kidder
RELEASED: 4 December 1980

- While the Richard Donner cut has a well-deserved reputation for greatness, the film that made it into the cinemas is no strength-sapping Kryptonite. It's a jaw-agape epic, with Terence Stamp's granite General Zod raising the stakes significantly.

VERDICT ★★★★★

CONDORMAN

DIRECTOR: Charles Jarrott
CAST: Michael Crawford, Oliver Reed, Barbara Carrera
RELEASED: 2 July 1981

- Half-spyfi and half-meta superhero deconstruction, *Condorman* underarms the unlikely possible lead – Michael 'Frank Spencer' Crawford – into a world of Bond babes, shifty Russkis and globe-trotting adventure. It's not clever, but it's just as much fun as it sounds.

VERDICT ★★★★★

SUPERMAN III

DIRECTOR: Richard Lester
CAST: Christopher Reeve, Richard Pryor, Margot Kidder
RELEASED: 16 June 1983

- Fully deserving of its lacklustre reputation, pretty much the only thing that's not been reheated from the first two movie is Richard Pryor – it's up to you which of those things is the worst.

VERDICT ★★★★★

SUPERGIRL

DIRECTOR: Jeannot Szwarc
CAST: Helen Slater, Faye Dunaway, Peter O'Toole
RELEASED: 19 July 1984

- Not quite the birth of the DC Cinematic Universe, the overlooked *Supergirl* is a far warmer offering than history remembers and it's strangely satisfying to see Jimmy Olsen reduced to damsel in distress.

VERDICT ★★★★★

THE RETURN OF CAPTAIN INVINCIBLE

DIRECTOR: Jeannot Szwarc
CAST: Helen Slater, Faye Dunaway, Peter O'Toole
RELEASED: 19 July 1984

- Not quite the birth of the DC Cinematic Universe, the overlooked *Supergirl* is a far warmer offering than history remembers and it's strangely satisfying to see Jimmy Olsen reduced to damsel in distress.

VERDICT ★★★★★

FEATURED: PAGE 48 THE TOXIC AVENGER

DIRECTOR: Michael Herz, Lloyd Kaufman
CAST: Andree Maranda, Mitch Cohen, Jennifer Babist
RELEASED: 11 April 1986

- Splatter master Lloyd Kaufman enters the superhero arena with pitiable geek turned vengeful freak in this endlessly rewatchable ecological exploitation flick.

VERDICT ★★★★★

SUPERMAN IV: THE QUEST FOR PEACE

DIRECTOR: Sidney J Furie
CAST: Christopher Reeve, Gene Hackman, Margot Kidder
RELEASED: 25 November 1987

- Compromised in every possible way – budget (ran out), locations (Milton Keynes), plot (Superman develops entirely new powers on the hoof), and casting (nobody really cares anymore).

VERDICT ★★★★★

THE TOXIC AVENGER: PART II

DIRECTOR: Michael Herz, Lloyd Kaufman
CAST: Ron Fazio, John Altamura, Phoebe Legere
RELEASED: 24 February 1989

- Moving that action to Tokyo for no real reason, *The Toxic Avenger's* second outing lacks any real surprise but there's enough guilty laughs and oozing gross-out moments to keep you watching.

VERDICT ★★★★★

TOXIC AVENGER PART III: THE LAST TEMPTATION OF TOXIE

DIRECTOR: Michael Herz, Lloyd Kaufman
CAST: Ron Fazio, Phoebe Legere, John Altamura
RELEASED: 10 November 1989

- More cartoonish and more crass than its predecessors, even the environmental subtext has folded in on itself as *The Toxic Avenger* series starts to cater for only the Troma faithful.

VERDICT ★★★★★

THE PUNISHER

DIRECTOR: Mark Goldblatt
CAST: Dolph Lundgren, Louis Gossett Jr, Jeroen Krabbé
RELEASED: 1 June 1989

- Had it been released after *Batman*, this grimy and effective revenge actioner would perhaps have worn the skull on its chest more proudly, but then it perhaps wouldn't be such an overlooked gem.

VERDICT ★★★★★

SUPERMAN



IN 1966, BATMAN MADE HIS BIG-SCREEN DEBUT IN THE PLAYFUL POP-ART PASTICHE OF THE COMIC-BOOK GENRE, BATMAN: THE MOVIE. SCIFINOW TAKES A CLOSER LOOK AT THE FILM THAT HELPED MAKE ADAM WEST AND BURT WARD POP-CULTURE ICONS AND LAUNCHED 1,000 SHARK REPELLENT BAT SPRAY MEMES...

BATMAN: THE MOVIE



Film

RUNNING TIME:

104 minutes

RELEASE DATE:

30 July 1966

DIRECTOR:

Leslie H Martinson

WRITER:

Lorenzo Semple Jr
CAST: Adam West, Burt Ward, Lee Meriwether, Cesar Romero, Burgess Meredith, Frank Gorshin

About

Four of Batman's greatest foes – the Penguin, Catwoman, the Riddler and the Joker – have banded together to steal an experimental invention that can dehydrate people into piles of dust. Their dastardly plan is to use the device on the United World Security Council and hold the world to ransom. Holy evil plot, Batman. The Caped Crusader and his ward Robin must foil their sinister scheme, battling exploding sharks and disposing of troublesome bombs along the way.

The transition from black and white to colour had a strange but wonderful effect on television shows in the Sixties. With colour came camp, and nowhere in the pantheon of US cult series is this felt more acutely than in ABC's *Batman*, starring Adam West and Burt Ward as Batman and Robin.

It's OK if you're already na-na-na-ing your way through the theme tune. One glance at West in his Bat-suit, and it's nigh-on impossible not to think of words like 'Pow', 'Thwack' and 'Kapow'.

The first series aired early on in 1966, becoming an instant hit, and by that summer the dynamic duo made

it to the big screen in *Batman: The Movie*. Just like the show, it's a brightly coloured, off-beat masterpiece of kitsch with some absolute zingers in a script that never takes itself too seriously. The film is also more knowing that it's given credit for, with a great cast of villains to boot.

The plot, such as it is, is classic TV *Batman*: Bruce Wayne and his ward Dick Grayson receive a call for help from a yacht heading to Gotham. The delightfully bombastic narrator (voiced by producer William Dozier) tells us that a revolutionary scientific invention and its creator are aboard and in peril. The two make their way to the Batcave, magically changing out of their civvies and into superhero garb as they slide down the bat pole, thanks to the

immensely handy 'instant costume change lever'. You just know the set designers had a ball when it came to labelling everything.

From the get-go the tone is highly stylised, with tongue firmly in cheek. Dozier famously wasn't a fan of comic-books; he felt they were a bit childish. His way around the problem when creating Batman was to 'overdo it' – that way the over-the-top humour would appeal to adults and the adventure would entertain kids. Look around the Batcave, and you see this philosophy everywhere,

"HAND ME DOWN THE SHARK REPELLENT BAT SPRAY"

from the 'Emergency Bat Turn Lever' on the Batmobile to the 'Interdigital Bat Sorter' machine – one of many bizarre contraptions that litter the set.

There's a childlike energy to these opening moments, too. While Christian Bale's Bruce Wayne took a while to get back into the swing of things in *The Dark Knight Rises*, here a tip-off is all it takes to get these two running to the Batmobile, and their enthusiasm is very endearing. Couple that with a Dutch angle, a turbo engine blast and that theme tune, and you've got a pretty strong start.

The movie's budget meant more gadgets like the Batcopter, which for some reason lives at Gotham airport. Before you start to question the paper trail that

maintenance, fuel and personnel costs would inevitably incur, Batman and Robin are at the controls and flying over Gotham. Bikini-clad girls wave at them (oh, that Sixties male gaze), the police take off their hats in solemn thanks and eventually they reach the yacht.

Even if you haven't watched this film, you will know this scene. Batman lowers himself towards the speeding boat using the 'bat ladder' (again with the labels). As he nears the ship, it disappears and Bats ends up in the water. When he's raised out

again a shark is clinging to his leg – although to the untrained eye it may look vaguely like a prop shark that has been put through the ropes of the

ladder – while West punches it repeatedly.

You know what's coming: "Hand me down the shark repellent bat spray": words that shall live on in infamy. The shark explodes as it hits the water, which makes perfect sense. It's not the last sea-bound creature to die in this film either: Batman and Robin casually mention that they were saved from a missile by "the nobility of the almost-human porpoise" that sacrificed itself so they might live. It's these absurdist, self-aware moments that tickle the most.

The rogues' gallery features Catwoman (played by Lee Meriwether, as series regular Julie Newmar had a scheduling conflict), the Penguin (Burgess Meredith), the Riddler (Frank Gorshin) and the Joker (Cesar Romero), all struggling to ➤



CLASSIC QUOTES

"SOME DAYS YOU JUST CAN'T GET RID OF A BOMB"
BATMAN

"BON VOYAGE, PUSSY"
BATMAN

"HOLY JUMBLE!
WHERE'S THE HOPE OF
THE WORLD NOW?"
ROBIN

"HE MUST BE USING A SUPER-
ENERGY REVERSE POLARISER"
PENGUIN

"IT WAS NOBLE OF
THAT ANIMAL TO
HURL HIMSELF INTO
THE PATH OF THAT
FINAL TORPEDO.
HE GAVE HIS LIFE
FOR OURS"
BATMAN

"HAVE YOU HEARD THIS ONE? IT'LL
KILL YOU, BATMAN!"
THE JOKER

"SUPPORT YOUR
POLICE! THAT'S OUR
MESSAGE"
ROBIN

"THIS CURTAIN WHICH SEPARATES OUR
COUNTRIES IS SO FOOLISH. IF WE COULD
ONLY CONTRIVE SOME WAY OF GETTING
MORE DEEPLY INVOLVED WITH EACH OTHER"
BRUCE WAYNE

"HOLY HORSESHOES!
SOME LUCK, LANDING
RIGHT ON TOP OF A BED
OF FOAM RUBBER"
ROBIN

"HOW SHOULD I KNOW THEY'D HAVE A CAN
OF SHARK-REPELLENT BAT SPRAY HANDY?"
PENGUIN



Batman: The Movie is out now on
DVD and Blu-ray, while the series is
coming to HD later in 2014.

THE GOLDEN AGE

BATMAN: THE MOVIE



work together as a team. The invention they steal is a dehydrator which can turn people into dust, then re-form by adding water – because, science! The four combine their talents well most of the time, but the Joker is relegated to the odd chuckle and bringing their hostage his tea.

Meriwether's Catwoman gets the lion's share of screen time, as she's also used to romantically manipulate Bruce Wayne in the guise of Russian reporter Miss Kitka. She and Bruce end up on a date and are later kidnapped by the master criminals as bait for Batman. Of course, he doesn't show up, but it gives West the chance to show off his fighting skills without the Bat-suit. The actor plays Wayne with a degree of sexual naivety and boyish sweetness – even when he tries to be threatening, it comes across as rather teenage.

West's deadpan delivery and talent for slapstick really shines through. His

"IT'S SAFE TO SAY THAT THIS FILM SNEERS AT THE ESTABLISHMENT"

funniest gag happens as Batman stumbles across a bomb in the villains' tavern hideout, prompting him to clear the rest of the bar, before desperately trying to get rid of the explosive on the pier outside.

He goes one way and sees two nuns; he goes in another direction and there's a mother with a pram, then a brass band. Batman races through the crowd to the other side of the pier, gets to the edge and still can't catch a break – a kissing couple on one side, ducks on the other and somehow the nuns and pram again.

"Some days you just can't get rid of a bomb." It's the kind of line you want to hear in a packed movie theatre.

As for the evildoers, you've got to love antagonists who have bad science on

their side. Their fiendish plot to take over the world by reducing the United World Security Council to dust sounds ridiculous on paper, but their earnest performances are enthralling. Gorshin's maniacal grin, Romero's trademark laugh, Meredith's comic quack and Meriwether's sultry seriousness are all delightfully daft.

Meanwhile, back in the script, Batman tracks the contemptible quartet to their submarine lair, and a glorious end fight scene takes place, complete with comic onomatopoeia splashed across the screen. Poor Bats sees Catwoman without her mask and realises she's been posing as Miss Kitka all along. "Holy heartbreak!"

All that's left for Batman, wearing his utility belt over his apron, is to sort the

HOLY IN-JOKE, BATMAN!
5 nods to Sixties Batman in pop culture

ADAM WEST THE SIMPSONS



1 The former Batman star bemoaned the passing of the Batusi to the Simpsons in a brief but memorable cameo in the 'Mr Plow' episode.

SHARK PUNCH BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY



2 Who hasn't dreamed of punching a shark in the face? Gamers got the chance to recreate that classic moment with Tiny the shark in *Batman: Arkham City*.

BOY WONDER FIGHT THE VENTURE BROS



3 In the episode 'Self Medication', Dr Venture's therapy group for former boy adventurers brawl, while 'Pow', 'Cower' and 'Torn Meniscus!' flash on screen.



It's fair to say you won't have seen the Caped Crusader's rogue's gallery like this before.



Lee Meriwether replaced regular actress Julie Newmar as Catwoman for *Batman: The Movie*.

piles of dehydrated council members into separate vials and rehydrate them as the world waits with bated breath. Thank goodness he had that 'Super Molecular Dust Separator' machine to hand. The movie ends with the delegates speaking in the wrong languages, implying that the procedure has messed with their minds a little. But hey, it's Batman, and he can just slink out the window and leave them to it.

In the first live-action *Batman* series of the Forties, the character was very much an establishment figure. *Batman: The Movie*, on the other hand, is practically counter-culture, which is no surprise considering the time in which it was made. Authority figures like Commissioner Gordon (Neil Hamilton) and Chief O'Hara (Stafford Repp) are benign and toothless – they do nothing bar gasp at hilariously paper-thin riddle deductions. A Pentagon official who sold a submarine to the Penguin is shown

playing tiddlywinks – it's safe to say that this film sneers at the establishment.

Robin's judgemental outbursts about riff-raff and cheesy lines about supporting the police and doing the right thing may seem like clichéd boy-scout prattling, but he's also part of a clever pastiche of a simpler, more straight-laced time. You can't have a superhero pop a cat in an inflatable dinghy while saying the words 'Bon Voyage, pussy' and not know what you're doing.

Batman: The Movie, like the TV show, is a brilliant send-up of the classic serials of the Forties and the Silver Age of comics. Somewhere along the way, the audience started to laugh at rather than with this incarnation, which for its time was a bold reimagining. *Batman* was designed to be a pop-art parody that took the pompous wind out of our sails through silly setups and purr-fect puns. It's a deliberate farce that is both colourful and subversive. 🦇

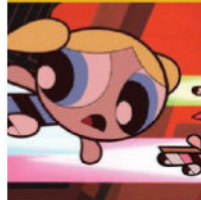
WATCH FIRST



LOST IN SPACE (1965)

A sci-fi *Swiss Family Robinson* that was a contemporary of *Batman*, and later imitated its bright colours and campy tone.

WATCH NEXT



THE POWERPUFF GIRLS (1998)

An astute cartoon take on superhero parody, this time with crime-fighting little girls, which also got a big screen outing.

BOMB VOYAGE THE DARK KNIGHT RISES



4 While not the same as carrying a cartoon bomb around a pier, Christopher Nolan's trilogy does end with an explosion over water and a death fake-out.

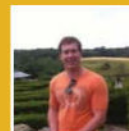
BATMAN SMELLS ROBOT CHICKEN



5 In this sketch, Batman and Robin teach some kids a lesson for singing 'Jingle Bells', *Batman Smells* that doesn't end particularly well for them.

YOUR TAKE ON THE CLASSIC

WHAT YOU THOUGHT @SCIFINOW



"*Batman '66* is superb! Adam West clearly the best Batman and much better than Bale with his laughable gruff Batman voice #Batman" @Jongardner100



"Simply THE best *Batman* film ever. For @therealadamwest IS Batman, the rest are pretenders. #Kapow #Zok #Biff" @RFBeatty



"It's brilliant! Shark Repellent Spray in the utility belt. Running around with a bomb with Bomb written on it. What's no to love?" @staineshoops



"It makes more sense than *The Dark Knight Rises* and is a rare case of successfully juggling multiple villains #batmanthemovie66" @NealCBrowne



"I love it. The bomb sequence, Burgess Meredith being brilliant and the sexiest Catwoman. And it's funny." @jhenrybenmore



"I personally love it. Great fun. Caesar Romero is a highlight as he was in the TV series :)" @andycrowther73

INTERVIEW

MARGOT KIDDER

SHE MAY HAVE GONE "GA-GA" AT THE SIGHT OF CHRISTOPHER REEVE'S TIGHTY REDDIES, BUT MARGOT KIDDER'S LOIS LANE WAS AN UNDISPUTED ICON. WE SPOKE TO THE STAR ABOUT SUPERMAN: THE MOVIE, SMALLVILLE AND "HUNKY HENRY CAVILL" IN MAN OF STEEL...

In a career that has spanned four decades, Margot Kidder has starred in some of the Seventies' most gruesome shockers: Brian De Palma's early Hitchcockian thriller *Sisters*, the underrated (pre-*Halloween*) stalk n' slasher *Black Christmas* and the notorious original *The Amityville Horror*. But for us she will always be Lois Lane in *Superman* – a role she played four times between 1978 and 1987.

We spoke with Kidder at Sydney Supanova, where she revealed everything about her *Superman* days, her guest stint on spin-off *Smallville* and her thoughts on *Man Of Steel*...

Can you tell me about your early experiences on the horror film *Sisters* and working with Brian De Palma?

Well, I can tell you about some of them, but not the others because I was living with Brian, so it would be quite unseemly! He was one of those directors that we're starting to go back to now, who loved actors and knew what actors do, and was able to help you through your performance and gear the characters he wrote.

Working with him was wonderful, it was his first horror movie and it was in the wonderful days, which we're coming back to, where kids are going "Hey, lets make a movie" before movies cost the budget of small countries. So in the same way now of digital, where you can grab your friends and go out and make a movie, in those days we got a 16mm camera and went out and made movies – it was a joy.

You were marvellous as Lois Lane in the *Superman* movies. Tell us how you approached the iconic role.

As a child we weren't allowed to read comics, and

so I never read *Superman* and never really knew how iconic he was to Americans when I started out. However, I had the advantage of a great script, which had a lot of snappy dialogue that went back and forth... you almost can't go wrong unless you're a bad actor doing that sort of dialogue. So I don't take that much credit for the performance; I think it was mostly in the writing.

"I NEVER READ SUPERMAN AND NEVER REALLY KNEW HOW ICONIC HE WAS TO AMERICANS WHEN I STARTED OUT"

MARGOT KIDDER



©Eva Rinaldi

When I played Lois, the women's movement had just taken off in a big way, so it was a big thing to play an independent woman. However, we hadn't got to the point where playing an independent woman means being freed from being ludicrously ga-ga when the man of our dreams was around! So I played her as almost speechless when Superman was around, because he's the great love of my life, and then I played it smart and sharp when Clark Kent was around because I didn't care.

When you were doing *Superman* did you have any idea how big a movie it would be?

No I didn't, because I grew up without television and certainly

not computers. I didn't really have a clue as to what a phenomenon it was to Americans, so I kind of gathered it was a big deal, but I didn't really get that it would be this huge at all.

What was the most challenging aspect of filming?

Physically, flying was very arduous and extremely painful! They would hoist you up from the rails and hang you, and there'd be a sort of railroad track going on, and they'd shout "action!" – I thought it was a lot of fun! But Christopher [Reeve] used to get a little nervous and his armpits used to sweat because that was his response to nerves, so there was this guy who's entire job during the movie was to go around with a blow dryer and blow-dry Christopher's pits!

And your memories of working with Christopher Reeve?

The first film went a year over schedule, and so it took us a year and a half to film. Now, I don't know if you

SUPERMAN: THE MOVIE



YOU'LL BELIEVE A MAN CAN FLY.

have siblings, but if you spend 18 months in a house with someone you get to know all their habits, all their intimate secrets, their good side, their bad side, their cranky side all that sort of thing, and so Chris and I knew each other that well, so it's really hard to answer that question. It's like asking the question 'What was it like working with me?'

Some days I'd be a joy and on others I'm sure I was a pain in the butt! And it was the same with Chris; some days we hung from the wires and chattered, told stories and had a great time, and on other days we would snap each others heads off all the time [laughs]. So it was like life. I remember when he had his first baby and came around to my house. I have a picture of his great big hand holding this tiny baby, so we were family and really close.

Gene Hackman was also exceptional as Lex Luthor. What was he like to work with?

Gene Hackman was so amazing! He did something different in every take and was brilliant in every take, and you never knew what he was going to do next. I would sit and look at him amazed, and sometimes forget I was in the scene and realise 'Oh, it's me!' It was a real privilege.

Tell us about the production of *Superman II*, when Richard Donner was replaced with Richard Lester. How did you get through that?

It was very difficult because we all really loved Richard Donner. He'd taken the movie very seriously as a director, and made us make it with as much truth and heart as we could. I think Richard Lester is a wonderful director and a wonderful person, but he was kind of a cynical guy at some level – but also very witty and delightful – so he couldn't help but put some of that into the movie.

They were trying to get him to go fast and shoot quickly, and so it didn't have the love and care that

The actress enjoyed her time on the *Superman* movies.



the Donner set had. You couldn't top a Donner! He came on the set every day with some practical joke to play on someone, and he was there if you had a problem – I was going through a divorce and was sobbing, and he'd put his arm around me until I felt better. He really was everybody's dad.

You returned to the world of *Superman* for your guest appearances in *Smallville*.

I thought that was a terrific series and I loved watching it. I didn't get to work with Christopher, as he wasn't on the set; there were just scenes of me with Annette O'Toole [Lana Lang in *Superman III* and Martha Kent

in *Smallville*], who hadn't aged a tiny bit in 20 years, which seemed kind of unfair! They were fun, but I didn't get to work with any of those talented kids who were part of the main cast.

The part I played was kind of dull and humourless, so I thought I'd give her a little extra zip, but the director and the producer didn't want that and kept calming me down. It seemed that she was acting underwater. When they asked me back a second time I said sure, thinking I could make something out of her, but then they killed me off, so that's when I knew the negotiations for further appearances were over.

How do you feel about Amy Adams' portrayal of Lois Lane in *Man Of Steel*?

What Amy Adams has done is go one step further due to the fact that Lois finds out he's Superman sooner in the movie. Also, she plays the character as always smart, together and on top of it, never becoming stupid because these days young ladies know they don't have to – thank God! Feminism has come a long way, so her role reflects that.

Did you enjoy *Man Of Steel*?

Again, I thought Amy was really, really terrific, and I only wish they'd given her more screen time and less for the ba-ba-ba-boom stuff! But then I'm a 64-year old grandmother, and so I think the answer that I'm giving is generic to 64-year old grandmothers! She is amazing in it and she has this quality where she lights up the screen, and so I wanted more love scenes between her and that hunky Henry! He's gorgeous...

I mean I'm far too old to do anything about it, but I can still look! I can still appreciate a good thing! ☺



The *Superman* Motion Picture Anthology is out now on Blu-ray.



Kidder would later renew her relationship with *Superman* by appearing in *Smallville*.

METROPOLIS ♥ DATING ♥



LOIS LANE

Occupation: Investigative Journalist

Hobbies: Falling off high things, getting kidnapped, being blunt.

About me: My job doesn't really leave me with a lot of

time for dating, so if we could meet up through work that would be awesome – whether you're a superhero or a billionaire evil genius, the way to my heart is through my byline.

First date: Let's sneak into the Lexcorp chemical lab, you can carry my notepad.



LANA LANG

Occupation: Small Business Owner

Hobbies: Listening to sob stories, serving coffee, gazing mournfully.

About me: I'll always be the One That Got Away.

If you've got an allergy you can bet I'll bring a dog to our first date, and if you're the Last Son of Krypton I'll probably go hijack a Kryptonite-powered battlesuit and get radiation poisoning.

First date: Star-gazing in the cornfields, but not the shooting stars – bad memories.



CHLOE SULLIVAN

Occupation: Student Journalist

Hobbies: Pointing out plot, foreshadowing Lois.

About me: I've been obsessed with one of my besties for ages, so I guess

I need to make like Zod and escape from the Friend Zone. My name doesn't alliterate but I'm not ashamed of that – it's kinda cheesy and I'm not sure why everyone is so into it.

First date: Whatever you're into, it's cool if you just want to be friends. I totally understand.



WONDER WOMAN

Occupation: Amazon Princess

Hobbies: Starring in failed TV pilots, fighting crime, making teens feel funny.

About me: It's easy to meet guys when you go to work

in a red and gold swimsuit, but it's hard keeping them when you can bench-press a tank. The lasso of truth, by the way, scares men off faster than creeping their Facebook. I need a hero strong enough to keep up with me.

First date: Romantic drive in my invisible jet and then an arm-wrestle by candlelight.

"THERE WAS THIS GUY
WHO'S ENTIRE JOB DURING
THE MOVIE WAS TO GO
AROUND AND BLOW DRY
CHRISTOPHER'S PITS"

MARGOT KIDDER

Kidder was close friends with Christopher Reeve off-screen.



SUPERMAN II

SUPERMAN II REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL SUPERHERO FILMS OF ALL TIME. HOWEVER, BEHIND THE SCENES, ALL WASN'T WELL. SCIFINOW TAKES A LOOK BACK...

Despite the well-documented conflicts between *Superman: The Movie* director Richard Donner and producers Alex and Ilya Salkind, Donner had fully expected to complete the filming of *Superman II*, which he had, for a time, been shooting simultaneously with the first film.

"My original contract was to deliver two films", Donner explains, "and everybody who signed was told that they were doing two films. We started both, and shot everything with Marlon Brando, Gene Hackman, Ned Beatty and Valerie Perrine for both pictures, and then we realised that if we were going to deliver the first one by Christmas [1978], we had to stop and put all our efforts into that. Having completed everything with those actors, we put *Superman II* on the side burner, and all our efforts into the first film. *Superman* was a success, and the Salkinds, for whatever reason, chose not to bring me back after I waited to hear for six or eight weeks. I got a telegram one day that said, 'Your services are no longer needed.' That's the Dick Lester story."

The other part of the Richard Lester story is that things had gotten so acrimonious between Donner and the Salkinds that Lester (who had helmed the *Three* and *Four Musketeers* for them) was brought in as a liaison between both parties on the first film. In the end, though, Lester replaced Donner on *Superman II*, and both he and the Salkinds were dismissive of how much material

Donner had shot for the sequel. Flash forward to the 2006 release of *Superman II: The Richard Donner Cut*, and the answer is obvious: the footage was substantial.

Insofar as Donner not being 'asked' to reprise his role as director, Lester was not surprised.

"By the time *Superman II* was supposed to happen, there was already litigation between Donner and the producers, so there was no way they were going to work together", explains Lester. For one thing, he was suing the Salkinds for money owed, plus, according to Lester, "He had set a list of demands like they would have to leave the picture if he was going to carry on. They then came to me and said, 'Would you do it?' Having been involved that little bit on the first one, I was astonished at the technical possibilities that were available to which I was totally and woefully ignorant in terms of miniatures and traveling mattes, which I had never been involved with. I came on more like an open university course, viewing it as a chance to learn what I felt I should know."

Ironically, it seems as though the things that had appeared daunting to Lester on the first film – such as trying to take a realistic approach with the main character – were what attracted him to the second.

"Not exactly", he differs, "because the problems were still there in that there wasn't any reality. I think you can see by the third one, where I had some input on the storyline – or at least more input – that I was playing around with the toys of reality by getting an actor like Richard Pryor and starting the whole film off in an unemployment office. In essence, it's really examining how far you can go towards a reality. That being the case, *Superman II* was more of a technical exercise, which was very interesting. I also found that I'd enjoyed the experience on *Superman* and had a very good time on *Superman II*. There's something remarkably easy about working on a film with four units. If anybody has a problem, if you find you're up against some problem on that unit, you just say, 'I'm sorry lads, but the flying unit needs me desperately', and you can walk away from that problem and whistle along in the studio. Nobody knows where you are, and they all assume you're hard at work on one of the other units, so when you're back they've solved that problem, and you go on day after day."

Yet despite all of the technical aspects of *Superman II*, there was a very human core at the heart of the film in terms of the Lois/Clark/Superman relationship.

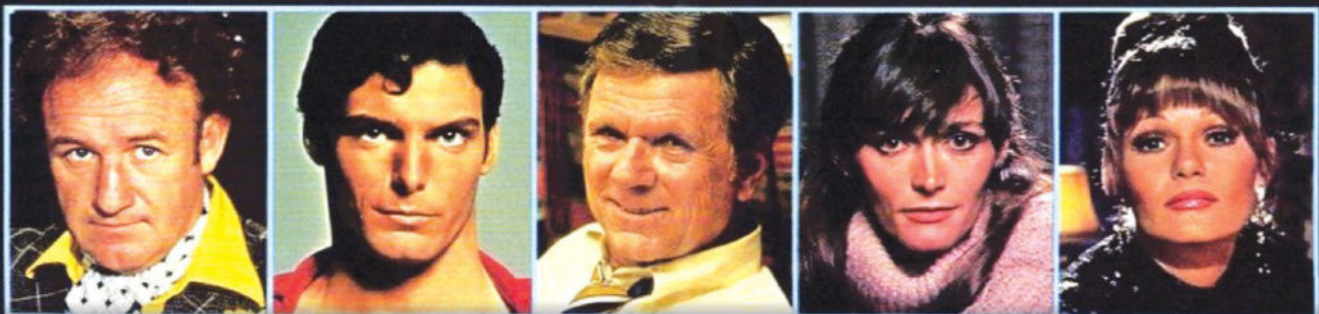
"I think you have to work hard at that", Lester admits. "My theory is that in a film that's very technical, it is important to always have a sequence, especially after



Despite his success on the first film, director Richard Donner was replaced by Richard Lester.

SUPERMAN II

SUPERMAN II



THE GOLDEN AGE

SUPERMAN II



In *Superman II*, the man of steel comes into conflict with fellow Kryptonians Zod, Ursa and Non.

➤ a very special effects-heavy scene, where two actors could work easily together. Where they didn't have to stand on a particular spot and have a cable up their backside, so you could have a naturalistic character/actor in to do a scene before you go zooming off into another technical, and therefore slightly stiff, sequence. We tried to make sure that we wrote with the Newmans [screenwriters David and Leslie] sequences where the actors could get their teeth into something that had a little bit of reality about it."

In terms of signing up the cast, *Superman II* got off to a rough start. Although Terence Stamp, Sarah Douglas and Jack O'Halloran had been signed to reprise their Kryptonian villain roles of, respectively, Zod, Ursa and Non (who come to Earth and plan to take over the planet), there were actually some difficulties with stars Margot Kidder and Christopher Reeve. Kidder made it clear to anyone who would listen that she was not pleased with the shoddy treatment given to Richard Donner by the Salkinds, and if not for the sheer necessity of her participation, the odds are fairly strong that she would have been dismissed. Reeve, for his part, had grown upset over the fact that he had been paid a reported \$250,000 for both films, while *Superman: The Movie* went on to gross nearly \$200 million domestically. Things got so bad, in fact, that he actually walked off the film. The Salkinds attempted some posturing, claiming that if James Bond could be replaced so could Superman, but a settlement was worked out, and Reeve donned his tights.

Having renewed his flying license, Reeve was more than happy to discuss his feelings about both Superman and Clark Kent.

"Both identities are more sharply defined in *Superman II*", Reeve said. "In the first picture, we had to establish who Superman was, and why he disguised himself as Clark Kent. This time, we came out swinging. Like most people of my age, I was brought up on Superman. I knew the classic stance – hands on hips,

cape blowing, bullets bouncing off his chest. That's the way the six and a half billion people have loved Superman, and I wouldn't dream of changing it. But I wanted to find other dimensions as well.

"In a sense", he elaborated, "Superman is a stranger in a strange land, a solitary man with incredible powers, trying to fit into his adopted planet. He has warmth and a great sense of humour. And while he has sworn to uphold 'truth, justice and the American way', there's nothing self-conscious about him. That's simply because it's what he believes in, in a world filled with arch-criminals and evil geniuses. However, Clark Kent is more fun to play. There's more scope to the role because he is such an awful mess."

In the pages of *Fantastic Films* magazine, Reeve added, "When you approach the Superman character, you must remember that when a man, superhuman or not, is capable of heroic deeds, he becomes a bore, a very pompous bore, if he doesn't have a sense of humor about himself. Because of all the amazing things Superman can do, he must temper his achievements with a certain kind of human modesty in

order to make himself acceptable to others. He must be secure enough about himself to make jokes and to be vulnerable in that sense. If he didn't, he would be impossible to relate to, and no one would like him."

Prior to the commencement of production, director Richard Lester and screenwriters David and Leslie Newman mapped out the tone of *Superman II*, determined to establish their own take on the character, which would prove to differ somewhat from the one offered by Richard Donner.

"I think that Donner was emphasising a kind of grandiose myth", offers Lester. "There was a kind of David Lean-ish attempt in certain sequences, and enormous scale. There was an epic quality which isn't in my nature, so my work really didn't embrace that. We didn't want to destroy the myth until we deliberately did in *III*. I don't think I could have done that sort of work in the early Kansas/Smallville scenes. That's not me; that was his vision of it. I'm more quirky and I play around with slightly more unexpected silliness. I've never really worked with storyboards before these films. I've never really prepared sequences in that way. I've been inclined to look at the day and see what's there and wing it."

Adds David Newman, "Our favourite is *Superman II*. The problem with the first film is that there was so much back story to get out of the way. I think *Superman* is three different movies. There's the Krypton part, which you had to tell because that's the legend, although there's something about it which seems kind of pretentious to me."

"Then there's the Smallville stuff", David adds, "and that's a kind of John Ford-looking film, with all those landscapes, Glenn Ford, farmers and all that stuff, which is another movie. And once you get to Metropolis, that's another movie. To me, there was an unavoidable clash of styles in *Superman*, although the film works wonderfully. *Superman II*, to us, was just a dream to do because you didn't have to go into all



Reeve and Kidder were both involved in disputes pre-filming.

that stuff. We were actually able to recap the original under the credits. And I love those three villains. To me, *Superman II* was a fairy tale. First of all, it was a fairy tale about love, second of all it had the greatest threat out of the films, because it was three against one with a slam-bang finish."

"And the thing we love most," says Leslie, "is the intercutting; the pacing of the stories."

"On the other hand," counters Leslie Newman, "you really don't have the time to get to know the individual characters on Krypton as characters, so you can't make Krypton have any reality."

An intriguing angle of the story for the Newmans was the Lois/Superman/Clark triangle.

"There's that great aspect of the mythos, which is Lois Lane," smiles David. "She loves Superman, but doesn't like Clark. Clark loves her, and is jealous of Superman, so he doesn't like Superman."



"BOTH CLARK AND SUPERMAN ARE MORE SHARPLY DEFINED IN SUPERMAN II"

— CHRISTOPHER REEVE

Laughs Leslie, "And in the love scene, which is our favourite, she says, 'But if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't have met you', and it's all so confusing because she's just found out the truth. I was fascinated by Lois and her relationship to both Clark and Superman, and the very nature of Lois. She reflects changing attitudes towards women. I couldn't bear the Lois of the Fifties, but then it was pretty unbearable being a woman in the Fifties. When you write a film, it helps to have somebody to write for. It doesn't matter if they're alive or dead. It's just a notion in your mind, although it's not likely to be that person in all probability, but it's who gives you the germ. So in this case, she didn't want to give it all up and settle down. She was spunky."

"Whereas the Lois Lane of the Fifties thought, 'If he'd only marry me, I could settle down,'" says David. "And she always got herself into dumb scrapes, not because of ambition, but because of stupidity."

One of the most talked about aspects of *Superman II* was the aerial battle between Superman and the three villains from Krypton. Perhaps surprisingly, Lester doesn't feel that achieving that sequence was as daunting as one would initially think.

"It was only insane in the fact that you sit down in a room with people, many of whom have quite reasonable brains, and have gone to universities, and are good with their children and wash their cars, tend their garden, who say, 'OK, he's going to pick up the bus and throw it at Superman. How do we do that?' And these grown men sit around for a while, and find the answers. Once you accept a certain set of ground rules, you realise this is the scale that looks real and we can do, and these are things we can't do; and you get the balance right. I've always felt about all films of this

Despite the troubled pre-production, *Superman II* was just as well received as the original.



type that unless you explain to the audience precisely what the powers are, they are happy with them. But I think audiences feel that if suddenly you switch the rules in the middle, you don't know where you are."

It's pointed out that *Superman II* actually did include a sequence where the villains levitated someone with a beam from their fingers, as well as a scene where Superman is blasted with a similar beam – neither of which actually existed in the comics prior to that moment they were depicted in the film.

"I don't see that that's any worse than super breath in terms of scale", Lester offers. "Certainly all of the scripts and changes were always sent to DC Comics to make sure they're in the canon. And, in fact, there was a representative from DC Comics who saw the dailies every day. Certainly nobody said, 'Well, that's something that wouldn't happen.' Mind you, I think if you did something absolutely insane but looked terrific, they'd say, 'ok, we'll go and write that into the next comic and have it out before the film comes out.'"

Upon its release, *Superman II* (which premiered in 1980, and made it to the States the following year) was greeted with praise, with a great many critics claiming that it was actually better than its predecessor, achieving the perfect mix of romance and comic-book action. Furthermore, the first two Superman films have successfully managed to endure the passage of time.

"I have my own feeling about that," says Lester.

"I think the myth and tricks within the original idea, conscious or unconscious, were treated with respect, sometimes more than others... we were all careful to respect that basic idea, and that will always work.

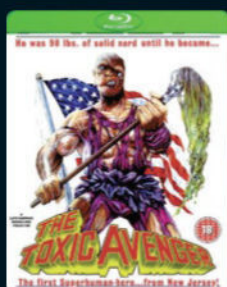
"Today, a Superman film would be easier to make," Lester smiles, "but it was bloody hard work at the time." 



The Superman Motion Picture Anthology is available on Blu-ray.

IT'S TROMA'S MASTERPIECE, THE VERY BEST IN SCHLOCK AND AWE! HE'S THE HERO WE NEED RIGHT NOW, THE GUY TO PUNISH EVIL, CORRUPTION, AND PEOPLE WHO STEAL OLD LADIES' CARS! JOIN US AS WE TAKE A TRIP TO TROMAVILLE AND CELEBRATE THE ONE AND ONLY TOXIE!

TOXIC AVENGER



Film

RUNNING TIME:

82 minutes

RELEASE DATE:

11 April 1986

DIRECTORS:

Michael Herz,

Lloyd Kaufman

WRITERS: Joe Ritter, Lloyd

Kaufman, Gay Terry,

Stuart Strutin

CAST: Mitch Coren, Mark

Torgl, Andree Maranda,

Gary Schneider

About

Melvin Junko is a dweeby mop-boy at Tromaville's most popular health club, hated by the evil fitness freaks that go there. After a cruel prank, Melvin falls through a window and into a vat of toxic waste. He undergoes a painful transformation that sees him become taller, more muscular, and possessed with an unstoppable urge to punish evildoers. He starts with the small-time crooks who litter the back alleys of the New York 'burg, but his do-gooding makes the absurdly corrupt authorities nervous, especially as they're looking at dumping even more toxic waste in the area. Can Toxie take them on while looking after his new girlfriend, and making sure his violent urges are restricted to the bad guys?

For schlock fans, Troma movies are the stuff of legend. The low-budget production company crew are an industry and a sub-genre unto themselves. Beloved by genre fans for their homemade aesthetic and cheery approach to gore, nudity and giddy laughs, their crowning achievement remains 1984's *The Toxic Avenger*. It not only created an icon in its disfigured, ultraviolent but sweet-hearted hero; it's the perfect showcase for their mad blend of cartoonish carnage, slapstick, social commentary and exploitation.

Troma was still in its fledgling stages when Kaufman struck upon the idea for the character that would become the face of the company. At the time, he was freelancing for other New York-set films, while working on the pre-production of John G Avildsen's *Rocky*. Having spent a lot of time in health clubs and gyms as the Stallone classic geared up for filming, the idea of setting a schlock movie in one of these locations took root. When he read an article proclaiming that horror movies were

over, he decided that this was the genre he wanted to work in.

Describing *The Toxic Avenger* as a horror movie isn't accurate; it's a superhero comedy. The character of Toxie is one driven by his desire to fight evil, whether it's in the form of a pimp trying to sell him a kidnapped 12-year-old girl ("You said you were going to take me to the David Bowie concert. He's not David Bowie!") or the town's bloated, corrupt mayor. He helps little old ladies cross the street, opens jars of popcorn for struggling housewives, and stops kids being mown down by lunatic hit-and-run drivers. The movie loves Toxie, and we do too.

But the film doesn't start with our radioactive waste-scarred superhero. Like all origin stories, it begins with his ordinary, humdrum existence. This being a Troma movie, everything is pushed into ludicrous excess, including our hero's utterly pathetic state. Melvin Junko (Mark Torgl) is the dweeby mop-boy at the Tromaville health centre, and is reviled by its resident fitness freaks. The opening title sequence takes us through the various aerobiscisers, weight-

lifters and body-image perfectionists that the film finds both hilarious and fascinating. This skewed take on the Eighties' obsession with lycra-clad fitness hunters is very much part of its charm, showing a John Waters-esque disdain for anyone so desperate to fit in.



While Melvin gawks, squeals and pratfalls, we get much more of an introduction to the four villainous hardbodies. The gang is led by the perpetually on-edge Bozo (Gary Schneider), his girlfriend Julie (Cindy Manion) and his friends Slug (Robert Prichard) and Wanda (Jennifer Babbitt). Just in case we're in any doubt about how monstrous they are, we're shown how they like to go out driving, looking for people to run over. Just as they discuss the scoring system (riddled with hateful racial epithets, just to really drive that home), we see an older sister waving her little brother off on his bike. Things don't end well for that kid. Kaufman and co-director Michael ➤

"THE CHARACTER OF TOXIE IS ONE DRIVEN BY HIS DESIRE TO FIGHT EVIL"



Toxie's all heart, in addition to being a super-strong mutant vigilante.



Melvin, mid-transformation and halfway to becoming the ultimate crime-fighter.



The film gleefully satirises the obsessive get-fit culture of the Eighties.



Poor Melvin is tricked into making out with a sheep, but it'll get worse for him.

CLASSIC QUOTES

"ALL RIGHT EVERYBODY, DROP YOUR TACOS OR I'LL BLOW YOUR BRAINS OUT"

LEROY

"YOU FAT SLOB. LET'S SEE IF YOU'VE GOT ANY GUTS"
THE TOXIC AVENGER

"FOR YOUR INFORMATION, EVERYONE KNOWS MONSTERS PREFER BLONDES"

BRUCE

"NOW WE'RE GOING TO GIVE YOU SIX NEW ASSHOLES. COMPLIMENTS OF ME, CIGAR FACE!"

CIGAR FACE

"A LITTLE MOTHER, WITH A LITTler BABY. YOU LIKE MEXICAN FOOD LITTLE BABY? WELL, HOW'D YOU LIKE THESE HOT TAMALES SHOVED DOWN YOUR THROAT?"

LEROY

"MY LITTLE MELVIN. HE MUST HAVE FINALLY HIT PUBERTY"

MELVIN'S MOM

"MOPS? MUST BE SOME KIND OF POLITICAL STATEMENT"

CHIEF OF POLICE

"YOU SAID YOU WERE GOING TO TAKE ME TO THE DAVID BOWIE CONCERT. HE'S NOT DAVID BOWIE!"

KANSAS RUNAWAY

"DUMB MOP BOY, HE CAN'T EVEN MOP RIGHT"

BOZO

"HE'S STRESSIN' ME JULIE, HE'S STRESSIN' ME!"

BOZO

"WELL, I GOTTA GET UP EARLY IN THE MORNIN'. GOTTA GO TO CHURCH"

SLUG

It wouldn't be Troma without this kind of thing.



Toxie reaches out and touches his lovely love interest Sara.

Herz show him flying over the bonnet, crawling across the tarmac and finally getting his head burst under the tyres of the reversing car (because you don't get any points if they're still breathing). The effect is absolutely grotesque, and it's so totally cartoonish that you're in no doubt about the filmmakers' intent. This is audible reaction cinema.

Shortly afterwards, the gang sets on a plan to humiliate Melvin in the worst way possible. Julie informs him that she wants to screw him, and tells him to meet her wearing something pink. The poor sap ends up wearing a tutu and making out with a sheep in a wig in full view of the entire health club membership. The despairing Melvin flees and ends up jumping out of a window and into a barrel of toxic waste on the back of a truck conveniently parked outside. And thus the transformation begins, as Melvin writhes, smokes and screams, and Bozo bellows that he's faking and can't take a joke.

The full change takes place with some impressively bubbly skin effects in the bathtub, and that's the last we see of Melvin. He becomes Toxie, a giant, muscle-bound but surprisingly articulate creature of vengeance. In one of the film's most unforgettable sequences he takes out the three violent crooks holding up a Mexican restaurant. It's also one of the most tasteless sequences in the whole film, mostly due to the introduction of the blind Sara (Andree Maranda). Interestingly, it was the shooting of her Seeing Eye dog

that incensed viewers rather than the threat of imminent rape that she faces before Toxie shows up to dispose of these troublemakers, using all of the tools a restaurant kitchen allows.



However, for all the gore and gross-out-ness, the love story between Toxie and Sara is crucial, giving *The Toxic Avenger* its weird heart. The fact that Kaufman and Herz treat their budding romance with the same sense of gleeful silliness with which they show Bozo and Slug beating up an old woman and stealing her car really contributes to the sense that the filmmakers' intentions are in no way malicious. The two fall into a romantic idyll almost instantly, and suddenly Toxie's hideout is covered in bright yellow flowers as the two hold hands, go on rambling walks through the countryside together and share a post-coital cigarette.

Inevitably, such happiness can't last, and Toxie begins to worry that he won't be able to stop himself from inflicting violence on people who don't deserve it. In one of the film's few indefensible sequences, he throws a small woman into a drying machine at a laundrette, weirdly quipping "No ticky, no washy" as he flicks the switch. It's a scattershot movie by its very nature, and this is one of the examples of something not working.

With the exception of the occasional taste misstep, there's very little about



Poor Melvin is tricked by the evil attractive gym-goers.

All criminals will pay the price for breaking the law. Brutally.



BEYOND TOXIE

5 Troma movies that you absolutely need to see

CLASS OF NUKE 'EM HIGH (1986)



1 A gang of school kids are turned into mutants by radioactive water in this mid-Eighties follow-up to *The Toxic Avenger*.

COMBAT SHOCK (1986)



2 One of the most interesting films on the Troma roster, this movie is about an Agent Orange-scarred Vietnam veteran.

SURF NAZIS MUST DIE (1987)



3 After an earthquake destroys California, a bunch of Neo-Nazis take over the waves. They must be stopped!

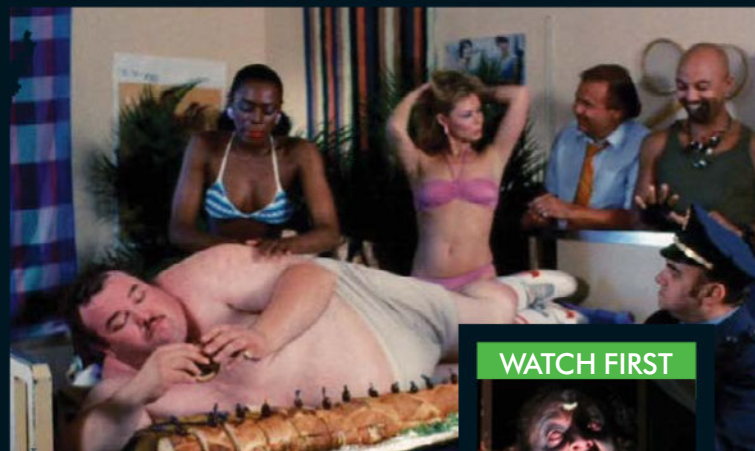
"THERE'S LITTLE ABOUT THE TOXIC AVENGER THAT'S NOT ENDEARING"

The Toxic Avenger that's not endearing. Its scrappiness is all part of its charm, something that's hammered home by the various incredible stories from its micro-budget production. The fact that a homeless man stole a prop gun and attempted to rob the crew with it while they were shooting the Shinbone Alley sequence is amazing, as is the fact that the sheep that Melvin makes out with was riddled with lice, and nobody told the actor this until after the scene was completed.

And it's also endearing because hidden under all the fake blood and bikini-clad dancing girls is a certain amount of social commentary. In addition to skewering the characters' ludicrous devotion to the gym, the toxic waste dumping in the New York area is presented as something that the Tromaville mayor and police captain are not only complicit in, but actually find hilarious. Pat Ryan is wonderful as the ludicrously corrupt mayor, seen at one point lying nearly naked on a table with a sandwich the length of his entire body.

Naturally, the Mayor gets his comeuppance in appropriately gory style, as Toxie tells him "Let's see if you've got any guts," and promptly punches into his stomach to pull out his intestines.

Kaufman and Herz would return to Toxie twice more to complete the trilogy, while Kaufman would direct a fourth movie solo in 2000. The Troma brand grew and grew, although it would take a big knock with the expensive flop *Troma's War*, and Toxie remains their most enduring property. It has stuck around to such an extent that Akiva Goldsman was linked to a family-friendly remake/reboot/reimagining directed by *Hot Tub Time Machine's* Steve Pink and potentially starring Arnold Schwarzenegger as a helpful stranger who trains Toxie. What's weird is that a family-friendly reboot could actually work. While we obviously love the violence and the schlocky elements, it's Toxie's heart inside his monstrous exterior that makes him special (and, to be honest, we'd want to keep the schlock). 🌱



WATCH FIRST



EVIL DEAD (1981)

Sam Raimi's homemade horror showed that you could have plenty of splatter for next to no money.

WATCH NEXT



TROMEO AND JULIET (1996)

James Gunn made his writing debut on this Lloyd Kaufman-directed spin on Bill Shakespeare's classic.

CHOPPER CHICKS IN ZOMBIETOWN (1989)



4 Billy Bob Thornton and Martha Quinn star in this schlocker about a group of female bikers in town run by an evil scientist.

CANNIBAL: THE MUSICAL (1997)



5 Uncle Lloyd picked up *South Park* duo Trey Parker and Matt Stone's hilarious debut about famed frontier cannibal Alferd Packer.



1989 to 2000

THE DARK AGE OF SUPERHERO MOVIES

Tim Burton drags the comic-book onto the screen in all its wild and wonderful glory, but studios lack confidence. Successes, like *The Crow*, *Darkman*, *The Rocketeer* and *Blade*, are exceptions in an era defined by the Batman-esque pulps of *Dick Tracy*, *The Shadow* and *The Phantom*, and then MTV-schlock like *Spawn* and *Steel*...

FEATURED: PAGE 54 BATMAN

DIRECTOR: Tim Burton
CAST: Jack Nicholson, Michael Keaton, Kim Basinger

RELEASED: 23 June 1989

- With *The Dark Knight*, Nolan was keen to terrorise and thrill by creating a world that was possible; with *Batman*, Burton gave audiences a beastly fairy tale that danced to the tune of Prince.

VERDICT ★★★★★

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

DIRECTOR: Steve Barron

CAST: Judith Hoag, Elias Koteas, Josh Pais

RELEASED: 30 March 1990

- The animatronics still look good thanks to Jim Henson's Creature Shop, but the flat script doesn't know what to do with the characters besides Joker Michelangelo and bad-boy Raphael, and the plot hits a brick wall.

VERDICT ★★★☆☆

DICK TRACY

DIRECTOR: Warren Beatty

CAST: Warren Beatty, Madonna, Al Pacino

RELEASED: 15 June 1990

- A garish folly – seeing Warren Beatty and Madonna get it on is pure fever dream – but it's fantastic to look at. *Dick Tracy* may only be a superhero movie in style, but what style!

VERDICT ★★★★★

DARKMAN

DIRECTOR: Sam Raimi

CAST: Liam Neeson, Frances McDormand, Colin Fries

RELEASED: 24 August 1990

- Wild, weird and utterly unrivalled, this is the missing link between Sam Raimi's grave-robbing old life and his web-spinning new one.

VERDICT ★★★★★

CAPTAIN AMERICA

DIRECTOR: Albert Pyun

CAST: Matt Salinger, Ronny Cox, Ned Beatty

RELEASED: 14 December 1990

- Strangely faithful and lamentably low-rent, this Italian-set Yugoslav co-production feels like a refugee TV movie to be rewatched in the twilight hours with David S Goyer's *Nick Fury* pilot.

VERDICT ★★★★★

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II: THE SECRET OF THE OOZE

DIRECTOR: Michael Pressman

CAST: Paige Turco, David Warner, Michelan Sisti

RELEASED: 22 March 1991

- It's nowhere near as dark or as violent as the first film – they barely use their weapons at all – and commits the unforgivable crime of introducing super-up mutant animal villains that aren't Bebop and Rocksteady.

VERDICT ★★★★★

BATMAN RETURNS

DIRECTOR: Tim Burton

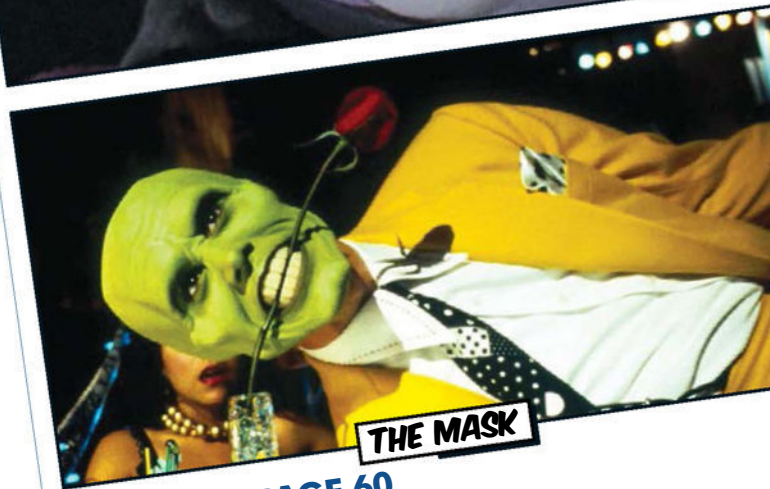
CAST: Michael Keaton, Danny DeVito, Michelle Pfeiffer

RELEASED: 19 June 1992

- The sumptuous riposte to claims that films have been ruined by too many villains, *Batman Returns* offers up a web of motivations and relationships that makes it not just comic-book perfect, but mouth-watering to watch.

VERDICT ★★★★★

BLADE



THE MASK

FEATURED: PAGE 60 THE ROCKETEER

DIRECTOR: Joe Johnston

CAST: Billy Campbell, Jennifer Connelly

RELEASED: 21 June 1991

- A gloriously retro-tinged heir to *Indiana Jones*, so faithful is it to the tropes of pulp that you'd be surprised to discover that the original comic was published in 1982 and not 1942.

VERDICT ★★★★★

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III

DIRECTOR: Stuart Gillard

CAST: Elias Koteas, Paige Turco, Stuart Wilson

RELEASED: 17 March 1993

- The Turtles are thrown back in time to medieval Japan by a mystical scepter in a cheap attempt to get them into traditional Japanese armour. No one will ever describe this film as 'underrated' with a straight face.

VERDICT ★★★★★



BLANKMAN

DIRECTOR: Mike Binder
CAST: Damon Wayans, David Alan Grier, Robin Givens
RELEASED: 19 August 1994
 ● Screamingly surreal knockabout comedy *Blankman* takes swipes at the softest of targets – Sixties *Batman* – and that's tough to truly get behind. Ultimately though, enjoyment depends on your appreciation for gumming Nineties slapstick.
VERDICT ★★★★★

BATMAN

FEATURED: PAGE 64 THE MASK

DIRECTOR: Chuck Russell
CAST: Jim Carrey, Cameron Diaz, Peter Riegert
RELEASED: 29 July 1994
 ● The flagship offering from the year in which Jim Carrey was in everything, *The Mask* may have eschewed the comic's ultra-violence – which is fine – but dropping the satire is difficult to bounce back from.
VERDICT ★★★★★

BATMAN FOREVER

DIRECTOR: Joel Schumacher
CAST: Val Kilmer, Tommy Lee Jones, Jim Carrey
RELEASED: 16 June 1995
 ● Not as bad as everyone remembers; simply average. *Batman Forever* lets the villains do all the heavy lifting that its heroes are incapable of – which is great news because the Two-Face/Riddler double act is a riot.
VERDICT ★★★★★

MIGHTY MORPHIN POWER RANGERS: THE MOVIE

DIRECTOR: Bryan Spicer
CAST: Karan Ashley, Johnny Yong Bosch, Steve Cardenas
RELEASED: 16 June 1995
 ● The Saturday morning sensation hits the big screen, and everything is bigger except the budget as crummy plastic armour replace the leotards and laughable wire-work replaces slap fights in parks.
VERDICT ★★★★★

THE PHANTOM

DIRECTOR: Simon Wincer
CAST: Billy Zane, Kristy Swanson, Treat Williams
RELEASED: 7 June 1996
 ● *The Phantom* slipped on the ladder the second it decided to put Billy Zane in a violet bodysuit, but against all odds he flexes and quips like a born swashbuckler through this lukewarm visual feast.
VERDICT ★★★★★

THE CROW: CITY OF ANGELS

DIRECTOR: Tim Pope
CAST: Vincent Perez, Mia Kirshner, Richard Brooks
RELEASED: 30 August 1996
 ● Getting in *The Cure*'s music video director is a nervous retrenching of this goth icon, and at no point in this limp retelling does *City Of Angels* serve up anything that will interest fans of sunlight.
VERDICT ★★★★★

BATMAN & ROBIN

DIRECTOR: Joel Schumacher
CAST: Arnold Schwarzenegger, George Clooney, Chris O'Donnell
RELEASED: 20 June 1997
 ● There's something fascinating about *Batman & Robin*'s vapid little panto. It's not malicious; it's just convinced you're having as much fun as it is. It turns out that you're not.
VERDICT ★★★★★

SPAWN

DIRECTOR: Mark AZ Dippé
CAST: John Leguizamo, Michael Jai White, Martin Sheen
RELEASED: 1 August 1997
 ● Riding high in print, supernatural antihero *Spawn* should have been the grade gothic schlocker came out as crass and two-dimensional as Todd McFarlane's original pages.
VERDICT ★★★★★

STEEL

DIRECTOR: Kenneth Johnson
CAST: Shaquille O'Neal, Judd Nelson
RELEASED: 15 August 1997
 ● Shaquille O'Neal takes on the man-made Superman in a superhero movie that can't look superheroes in the eye.
VERDICT ★★★★★

STAR KID

DIRECTOR: Manny Coto
CAST: Joseph Mazzello, Richard Gilliland, Corinne Bohrer
RELEASED: 16 January 1998
 ● The little boy from *Jurassic Park* becomes a sort of pre-teen *Iron Man*-meets-the-kid-from-*Flight Of The Navigator* in this harmless chunk of Saturday afternoon hokum.
VERDICT ★★★★★

FEATURED: PAGE 72 BLADE

DIRECTOR: Stephen Norrington
CAST: Wesley Snipes, Stephen Dorff
RELEASED: 21 August 1998
 ● Fresh, bloody and thrilling, *Blade* was an instant crowd-pleaser with a pitch-perfect performance from Wesley Snipes. It stands out from the Marvel crowd with its cynical worldview and buckets of gore.
VERDICT ★★★★★

MYSTERY MEN

DIRECTOR: Kinka Usher
CAST: Ben Stiller, Janeane Garofalo
RELEASED: 6 August 1999
 ● The first superhero comedy to reward comic geeks, *Mystery Men* befuddled audiences with its lack of easy guffaws and its wry asides, creating a slow-burning classic that deserves cult status.
VERDICT ★★★★★

THE GUYVER

DIRECTOR: Screaming Mad George, Steve Wang
CAST: Greg Jung Paik, Jimmie Walker, Peter Spellos
RELEASED: 3 June 1992
 ● Based on the 1985 Manga, this proto-*Power Rangers* movie bundles unforgettable character design into a rote superhero arc that trundles numbly along on the inside lane.
VERDICT ★★★★★

THE METEOR MAN

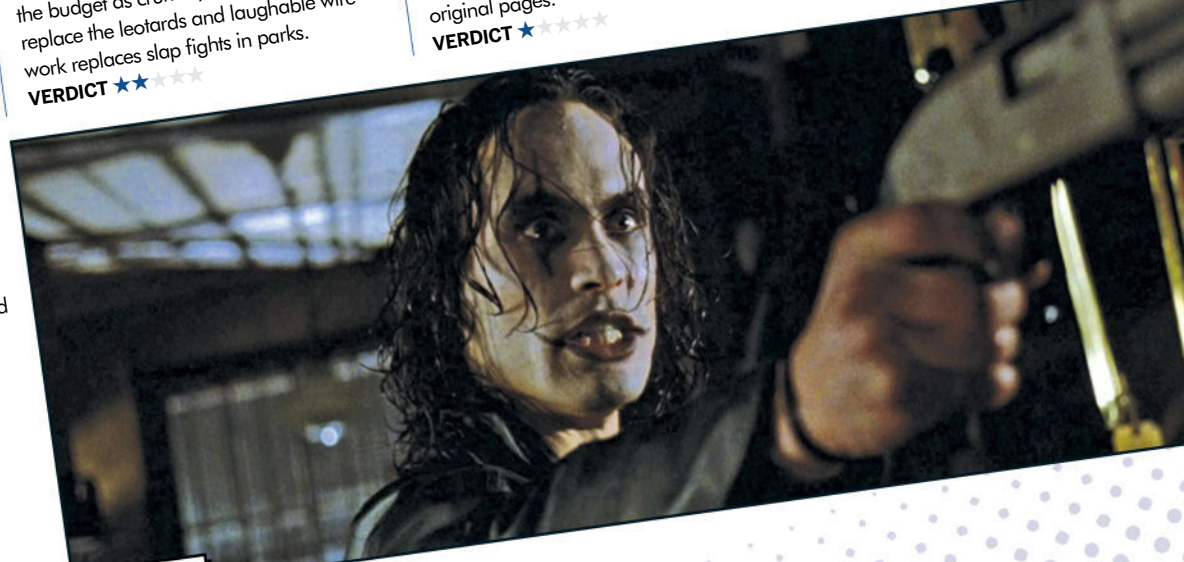
DIRECTOR: Robert Townsend
CAST: Robert Townsend, Marla Gibbs, Eddie Griffin
RELEASED: 6 August 1993
 ● Not the most profound deconstruction of the sub-genre, but this superhero comedy charms you effortlessly simply by meaning so well.
VERDICT ★★★★★

FEATURED: PAGE 68 THE CROW

DIRECTOR: Alex Proyas
CAST: Brandon Lee, Michael Wincott, Rochelle Davis
RELEASED: 11 May 1994
 ● Stilted, clunky and ponderous, *The Crow* is intentionally so – a graphic novel brought to life, dressed in rubber trousers and set to the best alt-rock soundtrack in film history. The tragedy behind the lens only adds to its mesmeric allure.
VERDICT ★★★★★

THE SHADOW

DIRECTOR: Russell Mulcahy
CAST: Alec Baldwin, John Lone, Penelope Ann Miller
RELEASED: 1 July 1994
 ● An uber-stylish romp from reliably mad Russell Mulcahy, *The Shadow* blends Burton's throwback stageyiness with gorgeously noir direction and a pulp-perfect plot.
VERDICT ★★★★★



THE CROW

BATMAN

IT WASN'T THAT NOBODY BELIEVED A BATMAN MOVIE COULD BE DONE WITHOUT BEING CAMP; MORE THAT THEY DIDN'T THINK A SUPERHERO MOVIE COULD BE DONE WITHOUT BEING CAMP. STARS MICHAEL KEATON AND JACK NICHOLSON, DIRECTOR TIM BURTON AND OTHERS RECALL THE TRIALS, TRIBULATIONS AND THE ORIGIN STORY BEHIND THE FIRST MODERN SUPERHERO FILM...

Fandom fairly exploded when Ben Affleck was announced as Batman/Bruce Wayne in 2016's follow-up to *Man Of Steel*. But that response was relatively sedate compared to the one greeting the news that actor Michael Keaton – Mr Mom himself – had been cast in the role for Tim Burton's 1989 version. And that news, in turn, was nothing compared to what would have happened if producers Jon Peters and Peter Guber's original plans had been brought to fruition.

"There was only one other actor that we really wanted, which was Bill Murray," explains Peters, who paused to let that one sink in for a minute. "At one point we played with the idea of Bill Murray and Eddie Murphy playing Batman and Robin. Peter and I had done a lot of movies, and many began in concept as party jokes. *Batman* was always something that we really wanted to do, and we worked on it for a long time. The idea of Bill Murray set the tone for the movie in the sense that we wanted someone who had a comedic sensibility, but also had a dark side and an explosive side, which most comics do, especially Bill Murray. Not until we saw *Beetlejuice* did we realise that this guy who played Mr Mom had a ferocious side and was completely, unbelievably explosive. That's when we started zeroing in. There was a mention of all kinds of other actors to play Batman, and every agent in Hollywood would call us, but Peter and I hung in there until we met with Michael."

Bottom line: they were right. 25 years ago, Batmania swept the world in much the same way it had back in the Sixties with the Adam West-starring television series,

although this wave was decidedly darker, more adult and grittier. It saw Keaton far surpassing expectations in the dual role of Bruce Wayne and Batman; Jack Nicholson owning the part of the Joker (until Heath Ledger came along, of course) and did away with the Sixties stigma that had dogged the character for decades. There wasn't a 'POW!' or 'BLAM!' in sight.

"This is not the TV show," executive producer Michael Uslan proclaimed. "It's completely different, because it is true to the comics. This is the story of Batman,

"MICHAEL KEATON BROUGHT A FRESHNESS TO THE ROLE – IN OTHER WORDS, HE KNEW ABSOLUTELY NOTHING ABOUT IT"

TIM BURTON

the creature of the night who stalks criminals in the shadows. This is his first battle with the Joker. It's a wonderful, original, unique and stylish film, and one that will not only thrill [then] 50 years worth of Batman fans, but the general public as well."

At the beginning of the Eighties, Uslan and his partner, Benjamin Melniker, acquired the rights to the character from Warner Bros/DC for what must have been a sweet deal (they have executive-produced every *Batman* film since) and began working with screenwriter Tom Mankiewicz to bring him to life on the big screen. Mankiewicz, of course, was the final writer on Richard Donner's *Superman: The Movie*, and had penned several James Bond films. As such, he seemed like a natural fit, although those efforts never developed beyond the script stage.

"When we did the original screenplay," said Peters, "we paid Tom Mankiewicz \$750,000 to write the first draft, then about seven drafts later we realised it never really worked. It was like *Superman*; it was derivative. It wasn't original, it wasn't different, it wasn't unique. We'd seen it already. Not until Sam Hamm did this version, which was darker, more extreme and aggressive, and saw Batman as a ferocious fighter, did we start to understand the direction we wanted the film to go in."

Leading them down that path was the success of Frank Miller's seminal comic-book miniseries of the

time, *The Dark Knight Returns*, which returned the character to his roots in a way that was shocking, yet appropriate.

"We started putting this project together brick by brick," explained Melniker, "and here we are. When Tim Burton joined the project, he really started shaping the film to his liking, and I think

a fascinating balance has been struck in the final draft. It's a wonderful piece of work and a wonderful blueprint from which to work."

Added Peters, "The script is like a blueprint, and not until you start to build and shape it do you really understand what you've got. By the time we were finished, the evolution of Batman was complete, as was the uniqueness, design and originality we always wanted to do. How we were going to get there we weren't exactly sure."

Burton was certainly a guiding hand, although he admitted that he had not been a huge fan of the character in the comics. "The reason I got involved," he said, "not being a giant comic-book fan and growing up more with the series, is that I was attracted to the images. Somehow it just strikes very primal ➤



➤ images – Batman, the Joker. The attraction probably also has to do with bats, which are very primal and great creatures. Any time you show people a bat, something perks up. I think they're very beautifully designed creatures and interesting. It's something that just strikes a very primal chord. I don't even know what that is, but I know that's why I was attracted. There was no other reason I would be. I feel more like a detached, normal person in my approach to the characters, than veering from one side, which is the comic-book, and the other side, which is the TV series."

Prior to being cast in the film, Keaton had worked with Burton on *Beetlejuice*, but had not yet received critical acclaim from his performance in the drama *Clean And Sober*, which is what made his casting so controversial. For his part, he was essentially unfamiliar with the character.

"I do know that even before this movie, there was a kind of a swell of a wave about Batman," Keaton offered. "I'm sure I was probably a year late noticing it. I noticed this Batman thing happening, then Tim [Burton] talks to me about this movie, and while we're doing it, the wave just kept building and building, and then cresting. Beyond that, I wanted to work with Tim again. He can get you to do things on a film. Sometimes, I get ideas where I want to push things out to their limit, and generally speaking I have an ally in Tim, because he's willing to go further out. I'm not even talking about just for unusual sake, but trying something different, and that makes me comfortable. To put it simply, I'd worked with him on *Beetlejuice* and enjoyed the experience, and wanted to do something with him again, and *Batman* came up."

"Michael," Burton interjected, "brought a freshness to the role. In other words, he knew absolutely nothing about it."

"That's absolutely true," Keaton concurred, "because I chose that way, and also I didn't think I had time to come up with anything. I decided early on, 'I'm not going to start going through comic-books and stuff; I

just don't want to work that way. I want this man to stand on his own.' One thing I did, though, was think I should go right back to the source: bats. So I actually read a little bit about bats for a while. I checked them out and tried to learn about them. Back when Tim told me he wanted me to play the part, I was curious as to what the script was going to be about, so I read it and just read it as a script, as a movie, and just really liked it. I liked the script and the fact that Tim was doing it."

As for creating the dichotomy between Bruce Wayne and Batman, Keaton laughed, "I pretty much guessed. Seriously, what I did was go with the character as written. I said, 'OK, forget he's Batman. Let's say he's a sumo wrestler. Let's say he's a jeweler. Look at what he's about and what he does and says.' I started working from the script and found what I found, which was that this was a very interesting guy to play. Then

you say, 'This is a man who decided to put on a bat suit at night and go out and seek justice.' That made it even more interesting. That really made it very interesting, and I talked about my impression of it with Tim. Tim told me what he was thinking, then I laid down the real basics of what he is and what he isn't, to start with. After that, I was mostly following Tim and going with my instinct."

Pointed out Burton, "The good thing about the script is that Sam Hamm, more than

Michael or myself, is a comic-book fan. So he wrote it very clearly with that in mind. It wasn't like we were all sitting around going, 'What are we going to do with this?' It was clearly delineated and true to the spirit of the character."

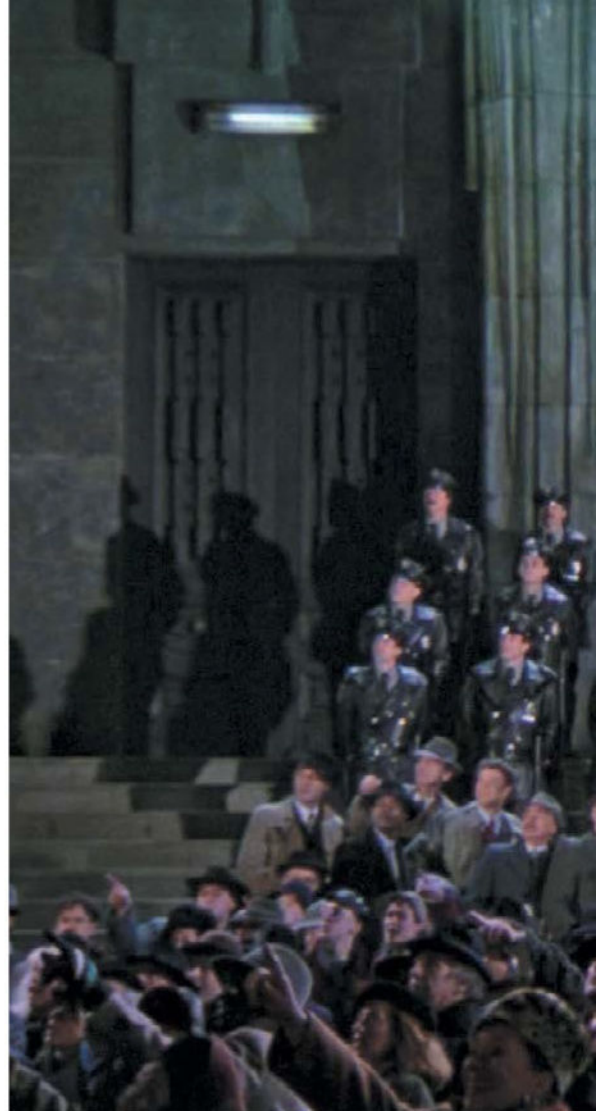
The other side of the coin, so to speak, was the casting of the Joker, with Jack Nicholson ultimately being chosen. Explained Peters, "Jack heard about the project for the first time with me in Boston on *The Witches Of Eastwick*. It was about 4am when we were preparing for a church sequence, and he was saying to me, 'I signed on to play the Devil, but I don't want to throw up on all these people, because it will ruin my career.' 'Jack, this is part of the character, you'll be wonderful. And just to get ➤

"WE PLAYED WITH THE IDEA OF BILL MURRAY AND EDDIE MURPHY PLAYING BATMAN AND ROBIN"

JON PETERS



Michael Keaton went against type to great effect as Bruce Wayne.





Tim Burton was the first director to attempt to sincerely replicate the comic-book universe.



THE BAT SUIT

Tim Burton and Michael Keaton on creating the iconic costume

Michael Keaton remembered when he first saw the world of *Batman* come to physical life. "I was amazed by all of these folks over there [in England] who build sets, created special effects, did wardrobe," he said. "I saw the costume and thought, 'Yes!' That was actually a question I had: what would I look like? Then I saw it."

"Tim said, 'I'm thinking of going with armour, because on the television series he just happens to elude bullets; his luck isn't that good,'" Keaton added with a laugh. "Tim said he wanted to do armour, and I asked him to show me. He started to show me sketches – he's visual, so he gets things. And I'm relatively visual, so

"TIM SAID HE WANTED TO DO ARMOUR" I get things, not quite as clearly, but I saw it. Then they did a

bodycast and started going from there, and the end results were pretty amazing."

"A lot of that had to do with Bob Greenwood, because he's the best costume designer," enthused Burton. "The key people – him, production designer Anton Furst, director of photography Roger Pratt – got into one theme, which is that you take a human being and make him something else. You make him Batman. Even though we don't get into the psychology, everybody went with that premise. I mean, he's a guy who dresses up as a bat. What can you say about that?"



Before *The Dark Knight*, Jack Nicholson was the definitive Joker.





Kim Basinger provides the love interest as Vicki Vale.



This Gotham was authentically grimy and lived in.

"THE DANGER OF A COMIC-BOOK MOVIE IS YOU DON'T WANT TO START SAYING THINGS LIKE, 'I'M AVENGING THE DEATH OF MY PARENTS'" TIM BURTON

➤ your mind off of it, let me tell you about this movie we're doing, *Batman*.' So it began about two years [earlier]." Enthused Uslan, "And Jack Nicholson is ideal as the Joker. It's like God created him for this role."

"You know, with Michael as Batman, we wanted you to care for him as a human being," said Peters. "We wanted you to feel for him. We had another problem with Jack, because we had to be careful not to like him too much. This guy could shoot you and laugh at you, and you love him. We wanted a story that basically had some warmth to it. We were trying to make a real movie, not just a *Lethal Weapon* or something."

Smiled Burton, "For me, there's a certain kind of joy when both Jack and Michael come onto the set knowing their characters, and then it's fun after that. You get a scene five different ways and come up with new things on the spot, but it's always a strong framework we're working in. Both of them know so much, and Jack just knows so much about filmmaking and can take any absurd thing and make it real. That sort of person is a real spark to me."

"But the tricky thing about these characters," he added, "is how you analyse a split personality. Nobody knows. Here, you're dealing with those issues in a comic-book movie, so you're really laden with trouble. So what we tried to do was give it a real short-hand sense of psychology. Be true to the spirit of it and leave it open to interpretation. The danger of a comic-book movie is you don't want to start saying things like, 'I'm avenging the death of my parents' or 'There's a bat in the my window. Now there's an idea.' We tried to avoid that and actually leave things a bit more open,

therefore taking some of the edge off of the conventions of seeing a balloon come out of Michael's mouth saying, 'I'll get you!'"

A major problem that had to be dealt with during production was the sense of propriety fans were trying exert over the project, and the media backlash they were creating in the process. Keaton, for one, said he was unaffected – which was particularly true in those pre-internet days.

"I was never aware of their feeling of propriety, so I was never hurt by it," he said. "Then we went to England to shoot the film, where we didn't have to deal with it, which was a big bonus. It was nice to be there, because when you're away, it's about doing the movie, not all the external things, which turned out to be a blessing. So a lot of this stuff was going on while I was over there, and when I got back I started catching up on it. By that time I just found it pretty amazing and funny. I guess if I'd had a real vested opinion about it one way or the other then that would have been hard, because then I could argue with it. I didn't have to do that because, basically, I had no knowledge."

Peters did, however, and both he and Guber realised that they had to do something to turn around the uninformed opinions. "I didn't intentionally try to think of a way to please the fans, I just figured that I'm a fighter, I had 90 fights as a fighter, I'm an aggressive guy, I'm a rough guy in Hollywood, so to speak" he detailed. "I knew how to make a movie with a guy who could kick ass, and I believed that Michael Keaton could kick ass. So I believed if we made the movie we wanted to make, ultimately people would discover what we discovered."

But I don't think I realised the depth and intensity of the Bat-fanatic all over the country.

"While we were shooting the movie," Peters continued, "the *Wall Street Journal* came out with this article where they absolutely, completely crucified us and did some research about Bat-conventions all over the United States where they were booing the concept of Michael Keaton, and were really feeling that we were bastardising the movie. These were very aggressive people. Peter Guber, Mark Canton [from Warner Bros] and I went into the editing room. We didn't tell Tim or Michael anything. They were making the movie, and if they started to read all this stuff, how were they supposed to make the movie? We had Jack Nicholson, one of America's great actors, playing a guy who smiles all the time. That's a big risk. He could embarrass himself. You've got Michael Keaton in a cape!

"In any event, we cut together a trailer, which became a famous trailer, and we took it back to America. There's was no narrative, no music, no names of who anyone was; just footage from the film. We put it in theatres, and it basically changed the direction of the perception of the movie and really got people on our side."

Pointed out Uslan, "Afterwards, there were a number of major stories in the media done *about* the trailer, and I don't think that had ever happened before in movie history." For Keaton, the importance of the whole thing hit him when he returned to the US from filming. "The first thing that happened," he said, "when I got off the plane from London is some guy from the airline said, 'Good luck with the movie.' I said, 'It went great,' without knowing what movie he was talking about. Then I realised that the movie was



Batman. So it was the first thing anybody said to me when I had gotten back, I realised something amazing was happening."

Batman is available now on Blu-ray and DVD

BY SHADES A WISTFUL RETROSPECTIVE OF A BYGONE ERA AND AN OPTIMISTIC GLANCE AT THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE FUTURE, THERE ARE FEW FILMS LIKE *THE ROCKETEER*. WE EXPLORE THE MAKING OF A TRUE CULT CLASSIC...

THE ROCKETEER



Film

RUNNING TIME:
108 minutes

RELEASE DATE:
21 June 1991

DIRECTOR:
Joe Johnston

WRITERS: Danny Bilson,
Paul De Meo

CAST: Billy Campbell,
Jennifer Connelly, Timothy
Dalton, Alan Arkin,
Paul Sorvino

About

Cliff Secord is a happy-go-lucky test pilot with holes in his shoes, gum behind his ear and a can-do spirit, who cares only for flying, his friends and the love of his life, Jenny. But when a prototype rocketpack comes – literally – crashing into his life, he becomes the Rocketeer, and in the process becomes embroiled in a plot that threatens not only his life, but potentially those of the entire nation.

One of the recurring features of future cult classics is, to use a cliché, that there's nothing else like them. Indeed, *The Rocketeer* encapsulates this feeling by virtue of its tone: at once a loving ode to movie-making of the classic Hollywood era, while simultaneously critical of its excesses; and a wistful recollection of a time when the dividing line between good and evil was far clearer, while at the same time a mournful refrain that with World War II on the way, the jovial enthusiasm of characters like Billy Campbell's Cliff Secord was about to be irreparably shattered.

Capitalising on the success of boys-own spirit adventures like *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*, *The Rocketeer* is mired in references to a bygone era that are both loving and tongue-in-cheek: note the rocketpack's first 'test pilot' being a stolen statue of Charles Lindbergh, the iconic all-American aviator, as well as the fact that Howard Hughes (played by *Lost*'s Terry O'Quinn) has a pivotal role in the film.

Modern-day superhero movies owe a lot to *The Rocketeer*: Johnston would transplant Cliff Secord's earnest idealism

"NO ONE WAS INTERESTED IN A COMIC MOVIE" DAVE STEVENS

into the Super Soldier formula-charged shell of Steve Rogers in *Captain America: The First Avenger*, and there's definitely something familiar about seeing Tony Stark blasting off into the sky in *Iron Man*.

The Rocketeer first took flight in a back-up strip in *Starslayer* issue #2, the brain child of creator Dave Stevens. The name 'Rocketeer' is inspired in the film by a lorry bearing the legend 'Pioneer' – that the two words go hand in hand is fitting. Stevens talked about his desire to create something "fun and heroic" in the documentary *Influence For The Rocketeer*, "something that speaks to me as a normal person doing something out of the ordinary; somebody who's really not that special, but has an inherent quality that's good... he doesn't have any superpower, but he comes through... that, to me, is a lot more effective as a reader."

Right from the character's inception, Stevens always envisaged his character in a movie: "I never really looked at it as just words and pictures on paper," he said in an interview with Jon B Cooke at the

2001 San Diego Comic Con. "I saw it and I heard it in my head. So for me, it was always a film. There was never any real big jump there."

Sure enough, the character was optioned by Steve Miner in 1983, but it would be writers Danny Bilson and Paul De Meo who brought the character to the big screen, their approach favoured by Stevens, who in an interview with *Cinefastique* magazine said: "Most people would approach my character contemporarily, but Danny and Paul saw them as pre-war mugs."

Harry And The Hendersons director William Dear was hired to direct, but what would follow was a tumultuous pre-production period, during which their script was turned down by numerous film studios. Superhero movies may be as ubiquitous as oxygen today, but back then they were a different proposition altogether. "This was 1986, long before *Batman* or *Dick Tracy*," Stevens explains. "In those days, no studio was interested at all in an expensive comic-book movie. We got there about three years too early for our own good!"

Ultimately, Disney snapped up the film, although there was a not-so ulterior motive to their actions. "They took one look at it and said 'toys!'" remembers Stevens. "So that's where we eventually made the deal."

The next five years would come to characterise the term 'development hell', with the House of Mouse and the writers frequently being at loggerheads over the direction of the film. Indeed, several times Bilson and DeMeo were sacked, although as DeMeo remembers: "Disney felt that they needed a different approach to the script, which meant bringing in someone else. But those scripts ➤



The Rocketeer emphasised the virtues of can-do spirit.

Production was lengthy, with even the helmet coming in for heavy scrutiny.



Jennifer Connelly's career would go from strength to strength.



CLASSIC QUOTES

"I COULD FLY A SHOEBOX IF IT HAD WINGS"

CLIFF SECOND

"IT'S A ROCKET, LIKE IN THE COMIC-BOOKS!"

NEVILLE SINCLAIR

"FLORA MAXWELL. THERE WASN'T ANY POINT DATIN' NOBODY AFTER HER"

PEEVY

"WORLD PEACE? WHAT HE MEANS IS A PIECE OF THE WORLD"

CLIFF SECOND

"I MAY NOT MAKE AN HONEST BUCK, BUT I'M 100 PER CENT AMERICAN. I DON'T WORK FOR NO TWO-BIT NAZI"

EDDIE VALENTINE

"I DO MY OWN STUNTS!"

NEVILLE SINCLAIR

"WHY DON'T YOU STICK THAT WELDING TORCH IN MY EAR AND CALL IT THE END OF A PERFECT DAY"

CLIFF SECOND

"HOW DID IT FEEL, STRAPPING THAT THING TO YOUR BACK AND FLYING LIKE A BAT OUT OF HELL?"

HOWARD HUGHES

"THAT SON OF A BITCH WILL FLY!"

HOWARD HUGHES

"WELL IT'S THE CLOSEST I'LL EVER GET TO HEAVEN, MR HUGHES"

CLIFF SECOND

➔ were thrown out and we were always brought back on."

This back-and-forth would take its toll, however, with Dear ultimately leaving the production. However, a replacement was quickly found in comic-book fan and future Jumanji director Joe Johnston, who promptly put his own name forward. He had already made us believe that people could be under an inch tall on *Honey I Shrunk The Kids*; convincing us that a man could fly was just more of the same. Ultimately, after the third major script revision, in 1990 *The Rocketeer* was finally green-lit.

Then came the casting. A number of major actors were put forward for the role of the dashing Cliff Secord, with Disney favouring Johnny Depp, while Dennis Quaid, Kurt Russell, Bill Paxton and Emilio Estevez all auditioned. Ultimately, however, it was relative unknown Billy Campbell who

helmet was a real problem at first," recalls Stevens. "Disney wanted to change it completely... But fortunately for all of us, Joe told them that if they changed the helmet at all, then it was no longer *The Rocketeer*, and he would not be interested in directing... I told Joe, 'Look, let me get with my sculptor, give us a week, and I promise we'll come up with something you can shoot... I immediately had a cast made of our main stuntman's head, grabbed my good friend Kent Melton... and came back with a helmet that really worked from all angles. We showed it to Joe, and he smiled and said, 'That's definitely the comic-book!'"

For the *Rocketeer* himself, the use of stuntmen suspended on wires (or even dropped from planes!), combined with the special-effects wizardry of Industrial Light & Magic (renowned for

"BILLY CAMPBELL NAILED THE AUDITION" DAVE STEVENS

got the part. Despite being Johnston and Stevens' first choice, they had to smooth-talk the Disney executives, who wanted a 'name' actor for the role, a decision that Stevens doesn't regret: "Billy Campbell is a good-looking guy, but he also happens to be Cliff! I would have never cast him based on good looks alone, but he came into the audition and just nailed it. He was made for it."

With Cliff cast, the rest of the ensemble fell into place. Jennifer Connelly (who would go on to date Campbell) was cast as his girlfriend Jenny, with Alan Arkin as Secord's friend Peevy, Paul Sorvino as gangster Eddie Valentine, and lastly Timothy Dalton as antagonist Neville Sinclair – a role based largely on legendary Hollywood actor Errol Flynn. Principal photography started on 19 September 1990, lasting until 22 January 1991. Stevens remained on set throughout production, which occasionally caused discord, especially when it came to the design of the titular *Rocketeer*: "The

their work on the likes of *Star Wars* and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*) and the expertise of Johnston himself (previously a special effects supervisor at ILM) allowed him to come to life. For the flying effects, a Cliff Secord model was filmed in stop-motion by ILM, combine with an 18-inch figurine that was moved around manually to create motion-blur.

"They used just about every effect in the special effects handbook – which they wrote – and they're using everything from miniature puppets to full-scale doubles on a blue screen to animation," remembered Johnston in the 1991 TV documentary *The Rocketeer: Excitement In The Air*. "They're combining all these techniques into each sequence."

The Rocketeer was the recipient of a big marketing push by Disney, with tie-in deals being made with Pizza Hut, M&M and Mars, and various computer games, toys, posters and trading cards released to coincide. \$19 million was spent on TV advertising, and two novelisations were



Disney execs at first fought the casting of Campbell.



Paul Sorvino looms large as gangster Eddie Valentine.



Timothy Dalton channelled classic-era Hollywood in his role as Neville Sinclair.

NAZI PIECE OF WORK

Five films in which the Nazis were the bad guys

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK (1981)



1 The original Nazi-adversary classic, a pre-WW2 Indiana Jones ensures that history's greatest bastards get their comeuppance. It's a wonderful piece of classic cinema.

OUTPOST (2007)



2 Supernaturally charged SS troops protect a bunker from any would-be interlopers, with depressingly efficient results. *Outpost* isn't the most well-known of the list, but it's worth watching if only for the make-up. Look at it! Glorious.

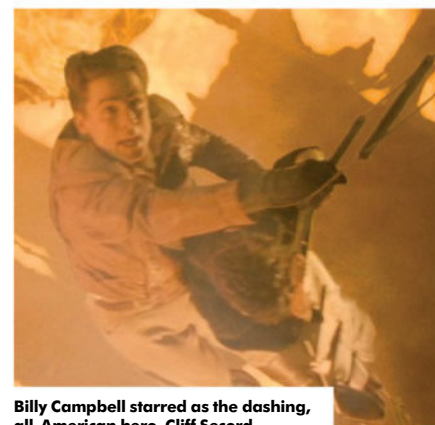
DEAD SNOW (2009)



3 This Norwegian cult horror sees a troop of tourists trying to escape a group of zombieified Nazi soldiers. They are a mixture of tradition zombies and a Norse beings. It doesn't go well.



The Rocketeer took heavy inspiration from the comics of the same name.



Billy Campbell starred as the dashing, all-American hero, Cliff Secord.



Today, Campbell has only fond memories of his time on *The Rocketeer*.

written: a young adult version by Peter David, published by Bantam, and one for younger readers by Ron Fontes, published by Scholastic Books.

However, despite this big marketing push, *The Rocketeer* flopped badly at the box office. From a budget of \$42 million, it earned just \$9.6 million in its opening weekend, before grossing \$46.6 million overall in the US. Plans for two further film sequels were scrapped in light of this poor performance, which was blamed alternately on confusion regarding Disney's involvement – as many wrongly believed it was a children's film – as well as the promotional poster, which while being undeniably striking, didn't draw attention to the cast.

Critical reception too was mixed, with the film currently having a 65 per cent rating on Rotten Tomatoes. For his part

though, Stevens isn't too dissatisfied with the final product. "The overall spirit and sweetness of the series is still there, intact. We lost some good character stuff in editing, but the tone of it is still what I was trying to project in the comic pages."

As often happens, despite being under-appreciated at the time, *The Rocketeer* has since gone on to garner an extensive cult following, with the once maligned poster having since become iconic, John Mattos' design adorning the bedroom wall of many a cinephile. Johnston became a Hollywood mainstay, since going on to work on the likes of *Jurassic Park III*, *The Wolfman* and *Captain America*, and Connelly's career has gone from strength to strength. With a potential remake being mooted, there is no better time to rediscover *The Rocketeer*. 🌀

WATCH FIRST



KING OF THE ROCKET MEN (1949)

The first of three movie serials, its influence on *The Rocketeer* is obvious. Check it out.

WATCH NEXT



CAPTAIN AMERICA (2011)

Joe Johnston's entry in the mega-big leagues has more than a bit of Cliff Secord in its Steve Rogers.

IRON SKY (2012)



4 Having escaped to the Moon during WW1, the Nazis have been living there in secret, waiting to take Earth back. Not as fun as it sounds. There is a sequel coming in 2016, so keep an eye out for it.

HANNIBAL RISING (2007)



5 As if there wasn't already enough to pin on the Nazis, it turns out that they were responsible for Hannibal Lecter's eventual evolution into a cannibalistic serial killer too. Damn them.

YOUR TAKE ON THE CLASSIC

WHAT YOU THOUGHT @SCIFINOW



"LOVED IT! Dalton as Errol Flynn meets Nazi villain. Jennifer Connelly being... Well Jennifer Connelly :) Awesome 30's style"
@dario006



"Loved it when I was young. Rewatched recently and still really enjoyed it. Wonderful fun."
@McDuggan33



"Really liked it. One of Joe Johnston's better films. Great visuals, very *King Of The Rocketmen*. Could do with a reboot"
@tsl_tony



"One of my favorite movies! Love the period, @JenConnelly (of course) but the soundtrack is my all time fav. Listen to it often."
@indianamulder



"Always been a favourite. A 1930s Iron Man & Dalton hamming it up, what more can you ask for!"
@safcinexvile



"Rocketeer is hugely underrated. Amazing score and full of charm (dodgy prosthetics though)"
@rusekkel

WHEN STANLEY IPKISS TRIED ON THE MASK, IT WASN'T JUST HIS LIFE THAT WAS CHANGED FOREVER: JIM CARREY ROCKETED TO SUPERSTARDOM AND CAMERON DIAZ WAS TRANSFORMED FROM TEEN MODEL TO HOLLYWOOD LEADING LADY. SCIFINOW LOOKS AT THE POWER OF THE MASK...

THE MASK



Film

RUNNING TIME:

101 mins

RELEASE DATE:

29 July 1994

DIRECTOR:

Chuck Russell

WRITERS: Michael Fallon,

Mark Verheiden,

Mike Werb

CAST: Jim Carrey,

Cameron Diaz,

Peter Greene,

Amy Yasbeck, Richard Jeni

About

Stanley Ipikiss is a hopeless bank clerk, down on his luck and bored with his life. He is used to being pushed around by his co-workers, his clients and even his landlady, and his only escapes are *Wile E Coyote*, *Pépé Le Pew* and his dog Milo. But after striking out with his crush Tina Carlyle and being denied entrance to the nightclub *Coco Bongo* in the same day, he stumbles across a mysterious wooden mask. Trying it on, Stanley is suddenly transformed into a green-faced, zoot-suited trickster with the power to warp reality and breeze through trouble with the force of a human tornado.

In 1989, Dark Horse Comics introduced a new character to their anthology book *Mayhem*, described as a cross between the animator Tex Avery and the Terminator. It had superhuman strength, speed and agility, increased intelligence and the ability to warp and manipulate the fabric of reality in a disturbing and cartoonish manner. Two years later, it was revamped and handed over to aspiring writer-and-artist duo John Arcudi and Doug Mahnke, who made new adventures for the character in a comic series that quickly became one of Dark Horse's bestselling properties. It was called *The Mask*.

The whole thing was trippy and colourful, combining cartoon violence with sharp one-liners in a comic that was madder than most. In 1994, *The Mask* was turned into a film of the same name that became a critically acclaimed worldwide hit. It cast the then relatively unknown actor Jim Carrey in a role that, weirdly, earned him nominations for both a Golden Globe for Best Actor and a Razzie Award for Worst New Star.

The super-elasticated, larger-than-life antihero *The Mask* is a manic entity that consumes the mind of whoever wears it. Dark Horse Comics says that "even the wimpiest geek would become an indestructible shape-changing super-tornado with a mind for mischief and an appetite for destruction." Pairing *The Mask* with Jim Carrey was a stroke of genius – a match made in heaven – because that is basically what he is: an indestructible, shape-changing super-tornado.

The project even shaped itself around Carrey's acting style. Director Chuck Russell had originally planned for the

movie to be a horror rather than a comedy, with the first script taking a darker tone. But after seeing how Carrey played Stanley Ipikiss and the Mask, it was turned into a vehicle for his unique brand of comedy. Russell has since revealed that casting Carrey in the role of the Mask saved the special effects department a lot of money – they had planned to enhance the Mask's movements digitally to make him seem more cartoonish, but Carrey was so lively and flexible that they didn't bother.

The star's influence on the film didn't stop there: Carrey started his career as a stand-up comedian, and the Mask's famous yellow zoot suit was based on a suit his mother made for him for his first proper stand-up gig. And, as if to get even more of his family's legacy into the film,

Carrey reveal that he based Stanley Ipikiss's characteristics on his own father, describing him as a "nice guy, just trying to get by".

The Mask acted as a stepping stone for Carrey's career, and was one of the three films released in 1994 that helped him haul his name into 'household' territory, the other two being *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* and *Dumb And Dumber*. Carrey was paid \$450,000 for *The Mask*, which turned out to be the bargain of a lifetime for distributors New Line Cinema, as *Ace Ventura* became a surprise hit that rocketed Carrey to superstardom. The film was a huge box office hit, grossing almost \$120,000,000 domestically and over \$350,000,000 worldwide. It received many favourable reviews from critics, with Carrey's exaggerated performance being

"IT HELPED CARREY'S NAME INTO 'HOUSEHOLD' TERRITORY"



The Mask sees the mild-mannered Stanley discover an object of great power.

CLASSIC QUOTES

"TELL AUNTIE EM TO LET OLD YELLER OUT. TELL TINY TIM I WON'T BE COMING HOME FOR CHRISTMAS. TELL SCARLETT I DO GIVE A DAMN"

THE MASK

"SOMEBODY STOP ME!"

THE MASK

"IT'S PARTY TIME. P, A, R, T. Y? BECAUSE I GOTTA!"

THE MASK

"WHAT ARE THEY GONNA DO TO ME, SARG? WHAT ARE THEY GONNA DO?"

THE MASK

"IT'S HARD TO FIND A DECENT MAN IN THIS TOWN. MOST OF THEM THINK MONOGAMY IS SOME KIND OF WOOD"

PEGGY BRANDT

"LOOK AT THAT! IT'S EXACTLY THREE SECONDS BEFORE I HONK YOUR NOSE AND PULL YOUR UNDERWEAR OVER YOUR HEAD"

THE MASK

"THANK YOU! YOU LOVE ME! YOU REALLY LOVE ME"

THE MASK

"IT'S A POWER TIE. IT'S SUPPOSED TO MAKE YOU FEEL POWERFUL"

STANLEY IPKISS

"SSSSSSSMOKIN'!"

THE MASK

"OUR LOVE IS LIKE A RED, RED ROSE... AND I'M A LITTLE THORNY"

THE MASK

"I'M JUST AN EX-EMPLOYEE WHO'S COME FOR HIS BACK PAY. OR SHOULD I SAY PAYBACK!"

DORIAN TYRELL

THE DARK AGE

THE MASK



1994 was a bumper year for Carrey, including not only *The Mask*, but also *Dumb And Dumber* and *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*.



As well as Carrey, the film also boosted the career of Cameron Diaz.

➤ dubbed 'joyful' by noted critic Roger Ebert, and even became the second-highest grossing superhero movie at the time of release, behind only Tim Burton's *Batman*.

Though Carrey is perhaps best known for his personal brand of over-the-top comedy, he's also a pretty familiar face in superhero movies based on comic-books. *The Mask* marked his first venture into the genre, but it's impossible to forget his rendition of Dr Edward Nygma, aka the Riddler in 1995's *Batman Forever*. Likewise, his turn as born-again Christian and patriotic badass Colonel Stars and Stripes in *Kick-Ass 2* made the news when Carrey decided to withdraw his support for the film due to his own stance on violence.

The Mask was very profitable, so much so that New Line lost no time in getting a sequel, *The Mask II*, in the works. Unfortunately for them, Jim Carrey turned down the opportunity to reprise his role, and declined the \$10,000,000 offered to him – a sum of money that would have set records. After working on the sequel to *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*, *When Nature Calls*,

Carrey became convinced that playing the same role twice offered him no challenges as an actor, and took an oath never to reprise roles. Carrey stuck to this for a while, but alas the *Dumb And Dumber* sequel *Dumb And Dumber To* has led Lloyd Christmas and Harry Dunne to come out of hiding after almost 20 years (if we're not counting the god awful sort-of-sequel *Dumb And Dumberer: When Harry Met Lloyd*).

Carrey's wasn't the only career *The Mask* gave a leg up to; it seems like Cameron Diaz has been in the public consciousness for centuries, but *The Mask* was actually her first acting job. She started out as a fashion model when she was 16, and worked around the world with big companies like Levi's and Calvin Klein. When Diaz was 21, *The Mask's* producers saw her leaving a modelling agency and got her to audition. They originally wanted former Playmate Anna Nicole Smith for the role of Tina Carlyle, but the decision was retracted after Diaz's 12th audition. Since that first film appearance, Diaz has



The film took its lead from the Dark Horse Comics character of the same name.

Ultimately, *The Mask* would prove to be a surprise hit.



"THE MASK HAS STOOD THE TEST OF TIME"

ALL ABOUT THAT FACE

The five weirdest prosthetics jobs used in film

THE BROKER GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY (2014)



1 The Broker wasn't supposed to be hideous, but he's really hard to look at. He's just so gross. Look at the head ridges. Look at that hair! And those wobbly bits bobbling about on his chin. Ugh. It's gross.

STEVE WEST THE INCREDIBLE MELTING MAN (1977)



2 The actor Alex Rebar was apparently so impatient and uncooperative during make-up sessions that he didn't wear all the facial prosthetics that were designed for him. He still looked gruesome though.

SETH BRUNDLE THE FLY (1986)



3 The Fly was brilliant, but the film's make-up department in particular performed a near miracle with Seth Brundle: they managed to make Eighties Jeff Goldblum not look sexy.

continued her uphill gentle bike ride to leading lady-status and world domination.

After its success, in 2005, an apparently unrelated film, *Son Of The Mask*, was released, but the long and short of it was that it sucked. It was directed by Lawrence Guterman and starred Jamie Kennedy, with Alan Cumming as Loki, the original owner of the mask itself. After Jamie Kennedy's dog stumbles across the mask and brings it into the house, Jamie Kennedy and his wife Traylor Howard (*Monk*) conceive a child 'born of the mask', sparking a chain of fun family hijinks.

The hijinks weren't so fun upon release: the film bombed at the box office and the reviews might as well have been blank save a clip art of someone giving the finger. Richard Roeper from *At The Movies* said, 'This is the closest I've ever come to walking out halfway through a film, and now that I look back on the experience, I wish I had,' while Lou Lumerick of the *New York Post* thought that 'parents who let their kids see this stinker should be brought up on abuse charges'. It did manage to pick up a few award nominations though. It was the most nominated film at the 2005 Golden Raspberry Awards, being up for the 'honours' in Worst Picture, Worst Director, Worst Screenplay, Worst Actor, Worst Screen Couple (the nominees

being Jamie Kennedy and anybody stuck sharing the screen with him), Worst Supporting Actor (for both Alan Cumming and the late Bob Hoskins), and Worst Remake or Sequel, which it won. It also received ten nominations and five wins at the Stinkers Bad Movie Award, including Most Annoying Fake Accent – Male for Kal Penn, Least 'Special' Special Effects and Most Intrusive Musical Score. Basically, it was dreadful; the tagline was 'the next generation of mischief'. It scored a rating of 20 per cent on Metacritic and six per cent on Rotten Tomatoes, with the latter's critics consensus reading, 'Overly frantic, painfully unfunny, and sorely missing the presence of Jim Carrey'. You get the idea.

The Mask – the good one – has stood the test of time. Though it probably won't go down in history as one of the greats of the 20th Century, people still remember it and widely regard it as a fun family film. People still dress up in a green mask and yellow suit at Halloween and elongate the 'S' whenever they say the word 'smoking'. Both Carrey and Diaz have since gone on to bigger budgets, and comic-book movies have moved on, but once watched, no one can forget *The Mask*. 🍷



The Mask is out now on DVD and Blu-ray.

WATCH FIRST



DARKMAN (1990)

When Liam Neeson is burnt alive, he returns from the grave to seek revenge on those who wronged him.

WATCH NEXT



KICK-ASS (2010)

A comic-book nerd decides to become a superhero after a mugging that leaves him unable to feel pain.



The Mask was Diaz's first film role.

Despite its acclaim, Carrey refused to return for a sequel.



DARKNESS LEGEND (1985)



4 Tim Curry's whole body was encased in make-up. Once, he got so impatient and claustrophobic that he removed it too quickly and took some of his skin off with the glue. That's enough for us.

JIM WHITNEY SOCIETY (1989)



5 He was designed to look like a face emerging from an anus. It doesn't get weirder than this. Tip: If you even need to Google 'Society screencaps' at work for some reason, use Incognito.



The film's slapstick was a departure from the comics' dark tone.

IN 1994, ERIC DRAVEN BECAME THE FIRST MAINSTREAM GOTH ICON OF MODERN CINEMA. RELEASED A YEAR AFTER THE TRAGIC DEATH OF ITS STAR BRANDON LEE, THE CROW IS A FILM ABOUT VENGEANCE, REDEMPTION AND LOVE. JOIN SCIFINOW AS WE TAKE A LOOK AT THIS CLASSIC CULT MOVIE...

THE CROW



Film

RUNNING TIME:

102 minutes

RELEASE DATE:

13 May 1994

DIRECTOR:

Alex Proyas

WRITERS: David J Schow,
John Shirley

CAST: Brandon Lee, Ernie
Hudson, Rochelle Davis,
David Patrick Kelly, Michael
Wincott, Bai Ling

About

On the eve of their wedding, Eric Draven and his fiancée Shelly Webster are attacked by a gang of sadistic thugs. Shelly is raped and beaten, while Eric is shot and thrown out of their apartment window to his death. One year on, Eric is resurrected by a mystical crow to avenge them. His only links to the human world are Sarah, a young girl he and Shelly befriended, and beat cop Albrecht, who was at the scene when they died. Now imbued with superhuman abilities, Draven stalks his killers across the ruinous city, eventually clashing with crime boss Top Dollar.

Hollywood in the Nineties didn't know what to do with cult comics. They either ended up adapted into horribly miscast star vehicles, such as *Judge Dredd* (1995), or too quirky for their own good like *Tank Girl* (1995). But there is one that stands head and shoulders above the rest.

The Crow (1994) is based on James O'Barr's 1989 graphic novel, written as a way of coping with the death of his fiancée in a hit-and-run accident years earlier. It opens in a dark, fire-tinged cityscape; the sound of sirens blaring in the distance, buildings ablaze and a weary child's voice.

"People once believed that when someone dies, a crow carries their soul to the land of the dead. But sometimes, something so bad happens that a terrible sadness is carried with it and the soul can't rest. Then sometimes, just sometimes, the crow can bring that soul back to put the wrong things right."

A few moments in, and as the camera swoops across the decaying city to a crime scene, you realise just how wrong: a woman lies dying after being raped and beaten by thugs on Devil's Night – the night before Halloween, where criminals delight in causing destruction. Chain-smoking beat cop Albrecht (Ernie Hudson) looks out of the woman's broken apartment window to see her boyfriend's body below. This was the night before their wedding.

One year later, a supernatural power personified as a crow brings the deceased groom-to-be, Eric Draven (Brandon Lee), back from the dead as an indestructible

avenging angel. His story has all the hallmarks of a typical revenge fantasy, but the movie's threatening atmosphere, gothic film-noir tone and Lee's soulful performance rescue it from predictability.

At the time of its release, comparisons were made with the likes of *Batman* (1989) and *Blade Runner* (1982), and its foreboding intro is cut from a very similar cloth. Director Alex Proyas creates a city that is arguably more intimidating than Tim Burton's Gotham.

Nameless, lawless and bleak, the festering urban setting of *The Crow* is a character in its own right, brought to life through Alex McDowell (*Fight Club*, *Watchmen*)'s baroque production design and Dariusz Wolski (*Sweeney Todd*,

face white with black gashes and lips like a masquerade mask as The Cure's *Burn* plays – one of many standout moments on the film's soundtrack, which includes Nine Inch Nails and Stone Temple Pilots. The iconic shot of Draven walking towards the broken window in his new persona of the Crow still electrifies, even if that look has been replicated by countless goths over the last two decades.

He goes on a hunt to find the 'whole jolly club with jolly pirate nicknames', including knife man Tin-Tin (Laurence Mason), drug addict Funboy (Michael Masee), arsonist T-Bird (David Patrick Kelly) and speed freak Skank (Angel David), who turn out to be underlings of crime boss Top Dollar.

There's a great moment just before his first confrontation where Draven dives gracefully off the rooftops onto garbage below before bursting into exuberant laughter, like he's only

just beginning to understand the extent of his power, and he's a little drunk on it.

Within 20 minutes of screen time, the Crow makes his first kill, nicking his victim's trenchcoat – William the Bloody must have been taking notes. He picks the gang off (mostly) using their own hallmarks: Tin-Tin with knives, Funboy with multiple syringes to the chest, T-Bird with explosives, and Skank is turfed from a window, just as Eric was. A revenge movie is only as good as its villains, and these guys live to blow stuff up, drink and murder, so watching them being picked off is immensely satisfying.

Top Dollar could have been a generic third-act antagonist, but the gravel-voiced Michael Wincott makes him something of an enigma. His half-sister and lover ➤

"THE SHOT OF DRAVEN'S NEW PERSONA STILL ELECTRIFIES"

Prometheus)'s bold cinematography. Rain-battered, filthy and contemporary – this could be any city if left to rot for long enough.

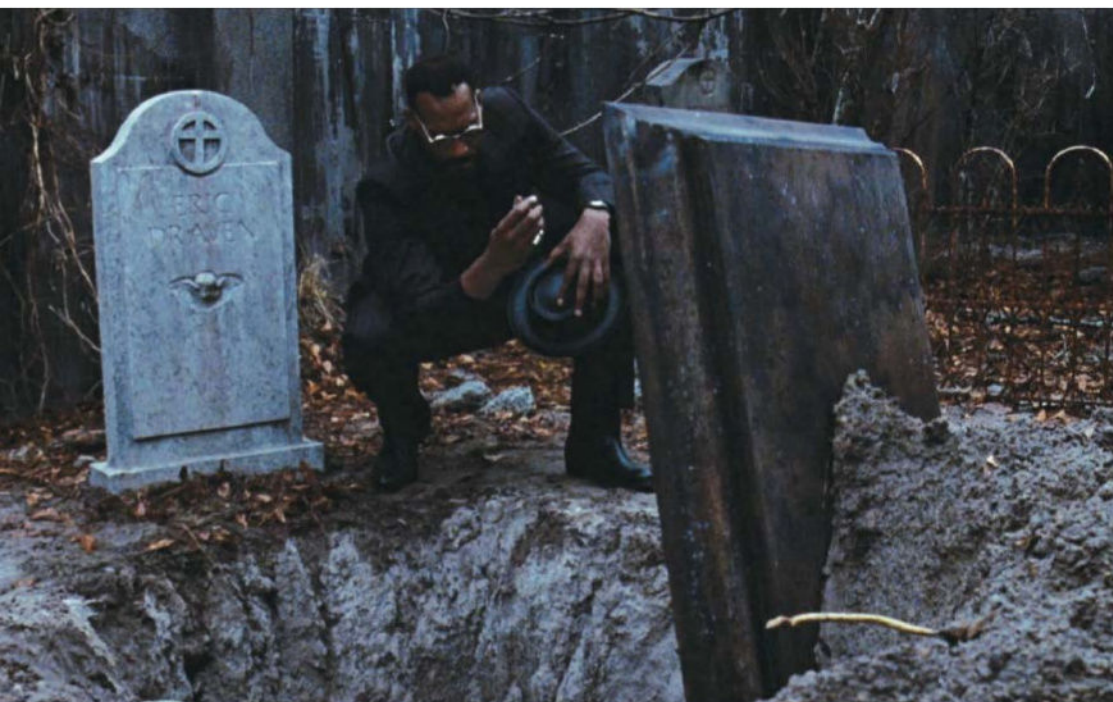
Young narrator Sarah (Rochelle Davis) gives the city its voice. She's streetwise and sarcastic, but also lonely. Virtually deserted by her drug-addict mother and utterly desensitised, she nevertheless helps to counterbalance the grime with some much-needed pluck.

The plot moves fast, with Eric clawing his way from the grave within the first ten minutes, screaming in agony as his murderers gear up for more of the same one year on – the criminality is relentless.

In one of the most memorable transformation scenes ever, Eric paints his



The Crow is out now on DVD and Blu-ray, and is overdue a high end Region 2 re-release.



CLASSIC QUOTES

"IT CAN'T RAIN ALL THE TIME"
ERIC DRAVEN

"IF THE PEOPLE WE LOVE ARE STOLEN FROM US, THE WAY TO HAVE THEM LIVE ON IS TO NEVER STOP LOVING THEM. BUILDINGS BURN, PEOPLE DIE, BUT REAL LOVE IS FOREVER"

SARAH

"LITTLE THINGS USED TO MEAN SO MUCH TO SHELLY - I USED TO THINK THEY WERE KIND OF TRIVIAL. BELIEVE ME, NOTHING IS TRIVIAL"

ERIC DRAVEN

"WE KILLED YOU DEAD, THERE AIN'T NO COMING BACK"

T-BIRD

"GREED IS FOR AMATEURS. DISORDER. CHAOS. ANARCHY... NOW THAT'S FUN"

TOP DOLLAR

"ABASHED THE DEVIL STOOD AND FELT HOW AWFUL GOODNESS IS"

T-BIRD

"HE WAS ALREADY DEAD. HE DIED A YEAR AGO THE MOMENT HE TOUCHED HER. THEY'RE ALL DEAD. THEY JUST DON'T KNOW IT YET"

ERIC DRAVEN



➤ Myca (Bai Ling) plays the sleeky femme fatale with a link to the supernatural. She recognises the threat that the Crow poses, and hurls them all towards their final confrontation on the rooftop of a ruined church, kidnapping Sarah before the event of her own ironic death.



As often happens with comic characters, they're invulnerable until they aren't, and sure enough the Crow is stripped of his invulnerability just before his big sword fight with the boss, who matter-of-factly admits that the responsibility for his and Shelly's deaths ultimately lies with him. It's a tad convenient, but ties things together.



"You know my daddy used to say, 'Every man's got a devil and you can't rest till you find him... You got a lot of spirit son. I am gonna miss you.'"

Rather than killing him with a weapon, Eric uses Albrecht's memories of Shelly's last 30 hours in intensive care to finish off

"THE CROW PAINTS A WRETCHED VERSION OF REALITY"

Top Dollar, who plummets to his doom on the spikes of a gargyle, its gaping mouth running red with his blood. If Graeme Revell's touching soundtrack doesn't bring a lump to your throat as a ghostly Shelly appears in a halo of white to comfort Eric at their graveside then you may possibly be dead already.

So what makes this film compelling? Well, conventional superhero stories say that one person can make a difference, but they are essentially wish fulfillment. In the 'really real world', bad people do terrible things and good people suffer. *The Crow* paints a wretched vision of reality that nonetheless feels closer to what we cynically expect from real life, and more so than other comic-book universes.

Compared to his peers, the Crow is as deadly, but not as macho-cliché as the Punisher, and certainly more unhinged than Batman. With his harlequin make-up and gallows humour, he has perhaps more in common with the Joker. For instance, the gleeful look on his face as a bullet-wound instantly heals before the eyes of his prey is pure Cesar Romero.

Eric embodies traits of the film-noir loner: alienated, tormented and morally ambiguous. He doesn't return to help the living – well, not much – but to avenge the dead, taking an eye for an eye. He stalks and kills, even engaging in a massive gangland shootout just to get at one man.

But he's also playful and a total badass. He seems to enjoy messing with these

"EVERY MAN'S GOT A DEVIL"

5 essential goth films of the Nineties

EDWARD SCISSORHANDS (1990)



1 Tim Burton and Johnny Depp's first director/actor pairing is part updated *Frankenstein* fable, part fairy tale with an outsider love-story twist.

BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA (1992)



2 Gary Oldman's Dracula manages to be dark, sexual, romantic and terrifying in Francis Ford Coppola's stylish adaptation. Pity about Keanu Reeves' accent.

ADDAMS FAMILY VALUES (1993)



3 Embodies that most rare of feats: a sequel that successfully manages to be even better than the original. Don't believe us? Two words: Camp Chippewa.



The Crow's landscape is a city of horrors, best encapsulated by its big bad, crime lord Top Dollar.



Imbued with a dark side both on-screen and off, everything about the film is ultimately bittersweet.

people, whether that involves hanging upside down as he interrogates a dodgy pawn shop owner or cracking wise while being shot at.

The Crow isn't quite the hero you expect to identify with, but you do, partly because his enemies are so repugnant that you can't wait to see them get their comeuppance, but mostly because the character is played with such focus, poignancy and depth by Lee, the film's broken heart and dark soul.

If you grew up in the Nineties then this angst-ridden and emotionally overwrought classic probably brings back a lot of memories. The Crow is a quintessential tragic hero for the 20th Century, driven by love and grief like all the best romantics. If you were a goth kid, this was the moment when the subculture tipped over into the mainstream – the cinematic equivalent of *Smells Like Teen Spirit*. You need only look

at the likes of *Blade*, *Underworld* and *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* to see how far that style, black humour and angst travelled.

For many, it's hard to watch given the tragic death of Lee just days from the end of filming. The actor was accidentally shot when a gun loaded with a blank round was fired, but with the bullet from a dummy cartridge from a previous scene somehow lodged in the barrel. He was only 28, and the film is dedicated to him and his fiancée Eliza.

The parallels between a character whose life is cut short, played by an actor who had already passed away, built a kind of morbid legend into the film. However, it should never eclipse what was a career-best performance from Lee, one that would have led on to bigger things had he lived.

The iconic imagery, blistering soundtrack and Lee's haunting presence make *The Crow* a very special film indeed. 🦇

WATCH FIRST



BLADE RUNNER (1982)

The bleak, urban backdrop of *The Crow* takes certain visual cues from Ridley Scott's classic film.

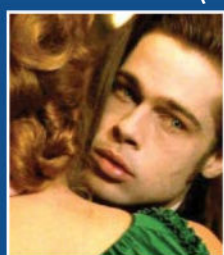
WATCH NEXT



BATMAN BEGINS (2005)

Like Proyas, Christopher Nolan creates a wretched Gotham City rotting from the inside, lacking hope and redemption.

INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE (1994)



4 An early example of vampire self-loathing on film, with Tom Cruise playing against type as the enigmatic Lestat and a brooding breakthrough role for Brad Pitt.

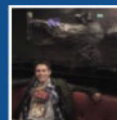
THE CRAFT (1996)



5 Nothing says 'teen alienation' like joining a coven, then getting booted out. Nails the dog-eat-dog toxicity of high-school friendships turned sour.

YOUR TAKE ON THE CLASSIC

WHAT YOU THOUGHT @SCIFINOW



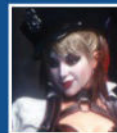
"It was quite unlike anything else being made at the time. Hope the remake does it justice. #TheCrow" @Tim_M_Matthews



"My flatmate's fave ever. Showed me it, didn't think it was great, but was OK. Strange directing though, very aged." @willmurta



"OMG, yes, one of my fave films. A) Brandon Lee C) Epic makeup/costume C) Epic story idea D) Awesome one liners #TheCrow" @Princess_N_SyFy



"It's a revenge tale, but one with heart. I think it resonates with people because of that. Plus, visually it was something fresh at the time. A beautifully gothic tale." @LilBlueKaiju



"The comic is a beautifully dark and tragic tale of vengeance and I'm as in love with it now as I was when I first read it. The film is ok (the soundtrack is spectacular)." @karlhughes001



"Got me through some dark times. Epic comic book, epic film. Please, no remake!" @stefmatt68

WHEN WESLEY SNIPES TOOK THE ROLE OF BLADE, HE TRANSFORMED INTO THE CUSSING, SWORD-WIELDING, LEATHER-WEARING, BAD-ASS COMIC-BOOK MOVIE HERO FANS HOLD IN HIGH ESTEEM. WE LOOK AT WHAT MAKES BLADE SO ENTERTAINING...

BLADE



Film

RUNNING TIME:

120 minutes

RELEASE DATE:

21 August 1998

DIRECTOR:

Stephen Norrington

WRITER: David S Goyer

CAST: Wesley Snipes,

Stephen Dorff, Kris

Kristofferson, N'Bushe

Wright, Donal Logue

About

When a young woman is bitten by a vampire during pregnancy and requires an emergency C-section, her life hangs in the balance.

She dies before ever seeing her newborn child.

But the child grows up to be a rare breed known as a Daywalker; part human, part vampire, he possesses

the superhuman abilities of the creatures that killed his mother as well as their thirst for blood. Instead of joining them, he vows to defeat them to protect the human race. He is Blade. With the help of his mentor Whistler and bitten blood doctor Karen Jensen,

Blade sets out to stop a vampire who threatens to take things too far.

As far as memorable movie openings go, *Blade's* first scenes are right up there with Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* and the dawn of man in *2001: A Space Odyssey* and Drew Barrymore's chilling phone conversations in *Scream*.

In stark contrast to the very first scene, which features a woman who is subjected to an emergency C-section having been bitten by a vampire, we follow a young man into a nightclub. He's lured in by a beautiful, apparently human woman, and struts through the crowd in time to the pounding techno music. Despite the abundance of clubbers, nobody wants to club with him. He's caught in a dancing crowd of hostility.

Suddenly, there's red on his hands. Licking it off, he confirms that it's blood. The DJ cranks up the tempo. The banner behind him reads 'BLOODBATH'. The sprinklers kick in and there's blood everywhere. The young man is surrounded by vampires. They're dancing in the blood, drinking the blood, and smearing it over their bodies. That pretty much sets the tone for the rest of the movie: ridiculous, bloody and completely over the top, but awesomely entertaining.

"TO BE HONEST, BLADE STILL FEELS LIKE A SPOOF"

Wesley Snipes' first entrance as Blade is also pretty special. Leathered, buckled and fully armed, he stomps right into the middle of the vampire rave. Half vampire, half human, he's what they call a Daywalker. He has the superhuman strengths possessed by all vampires but none of their weaknesses, besides a lust for blood. Basically, he is untouchable. He shoots up that joint and tackles a group of vampire assassins with nothing but a sword and his own sharp wits. Almost two hours and many violent and bloody deaths later, Blade is a legend.

Though it ended up becoming a New Line Cinema production, Marvel Studios started to develop the film way back in 1992, six years before its first cinema release. Back then, rapper LL Cool J was interested in playing the lead role. But for reasons unknown, the film switched hands to New Line, and LL Cool J's Daywalker dreams were quashed forever. With the new production company came a new script, which was written by a then up and coming screenwriter called David S

Goyer. At the time, Goyer only had badly received action and sci-fi films under his belt, including *Death Warrant*, *Kickboxer 2*, *Demonic Toys*, *The Puppet Master*, *The Crow: City Of Angels* and *Dark City* (which, to be fair, wasn't bad). Now, of course, he's known as the beast that wrote Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy and Zack Snyder's *Man Of Steel*, but it was his work on *Blade*, *Blade II* and *Blade: Trinity* (which he also directed) that set him on the path to genre superstar status.

Before Goyer started on the script for *Blade*, New Line wanted to make the film into something that was almost a spoof, but Goyer managed to convince them otherwise. To be honest, *Blade* still feels like a spoof, with its ultra-violent massacres and 'so cheesy they're cool' quips and one-liners. That's the thing about *Blade*: it's simultaneously lame and completely awesome. A scene that sums this fact up nicely is Karen Jensen's encounter with Krieger in her apartment.

When Karen returns home after her first meeting with Blade, there's already someone there. It's a cop who introduces himself as Officer Krieger of the 42nd precinct. The "door was open." He's just

there on a "routine check."

Sure you are, pal. Karen hears him out. He explains how her co-workers at the hospital said that she was kidnapped the night before. The other doctor she was with, Curtis Webb, died. But she shouldn't worry about that right now.

"Why?" Karen asks. Krieger suddenly switches from good cop to bad cop. "Because you're dead too, bitch!" he snarls, and starts to attack her. Karen whips out a bottle of mace and sprays him square in the face. Krieger squirms about for a while before realising he hasn't



Meet Blade: part vampire, part human.

CLASSIC QUOTES

"SOME MOTHERFUCKERS
ARE ALWAYS TRYING TO
ICE-SKATE UPHILL"

BLADE

"I'M GONNA BE NAUGHTY!
I'M GONNA BE A NAUGHTY
VAMPIRE GOD!"

QUINN

"MOTHERFUCKER! ARE
YOU OUT OF YOUR
DAMN MIND?"

BLADE

"YOU GIVE FROST A MESSAGE
FROM ME. YOU TELL HIM IT'S OPEN
SEASON ON ALL SUCKHEADS"

BLADE

"FROST IS TRYING TO
TRIGGER A FUCKING VAMPIRE
APOCALYPSE"

WHISTLER

"FOR FUCK'S SAKE,
THESE PEOPLE ARE
OUR FOOD, NOT
OUR ALLIES!"

DEACON FROST

"CHRIST! I'M TOO OLD FOR THIS!
SOMEBODY GET ME A GODDAMN
WHEELCHAIR!"

WHISTLER

"I WAS BORN A VAMPIRE, AS WAS
EVERY MEMBER OF THIS HOUSE.
BUT YOU, FROST... YOU WERE
MERELY TURNED"

DRAGONETTI

"THERE ARE WORSE
THINGS OUT TONIGHT
THAN VAMPIRES"

BLADE

"HAVE THE GOOD
GRACE TO DIE WITH SOME
FUCKING DIGNITY"

DEACON FROST

THE DARK AGE

BLADE

➤ actually been blinded. "What is this, garlic?" he laughs. "He said it would work against vampires," she says. It's cheesy and ridiculous, but exciting and awesome. But that's not even the best/worst bit.

After a dramatic entrance and a well-timed one-line, Blade whacks Krieger around the head. "You used me as bait?" asks Karen, scandalised. "Get over it," says Blade, and beats Krieger up some more. Justice is served, mofo. It's awful but beautiful, and brings a tear to the eye for many different, complicated reasons.

Part of what makes *Blade* so awesome is the casting. Stephen Dorff is weird and chilling as the Big Bad vampire Deacon Frost (a role which was apparently first offered to Jet Li). Kris Kristofferson is spot on as Blade's wizened and quip-throwing mentor and weaponsmith Abraham Whistler. N'Bushe Wright is charming and fierce as haematologist-turned-almost-



"MANY SNIPE FANS CONSIDER BLADE HIS BEST WORK"

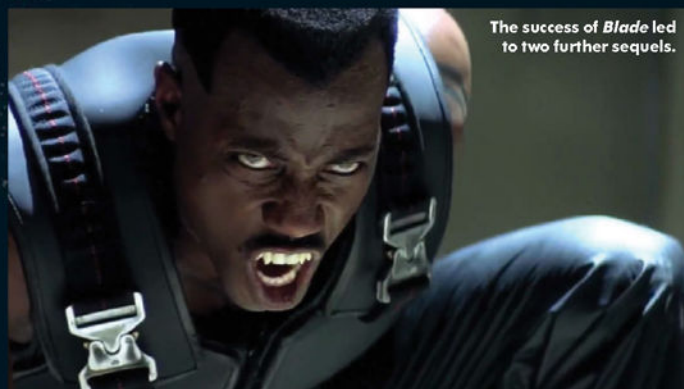
vampire Dr Karen Jenson. As for Wesley Snipes as our enigmatic protagonist Eric 'Blade' Brookes, many Snipes fans, if not all of them, consider *Blade* to be his best work. The character is what he became best known for, and La Magra knows he hasn't acted in anything as interesting since. *Blade's* action-heavy storyline and dark themes gave Snipes the opportunity to show off both his athletic prowess and his ability to act tortured and emotionally scarred in 300 different variations. It also helps that Snipes looks damn fantastic in *Blade's* shades. Can you imagine LL Cool J rocking a pair of sun specs with those dimples? Don't think so.

Before Snipes was cast as the vampire hunter, New Line actually had their eye on a couple of other actors, including Denzel Washington and Laurence Fishburne. But in Goyer's mind, Snipes was always the perfect choice. And as if he couldn't get any cooler, he's a martial artist in real life as well as in the film, having started training when he was 12 years old. He's

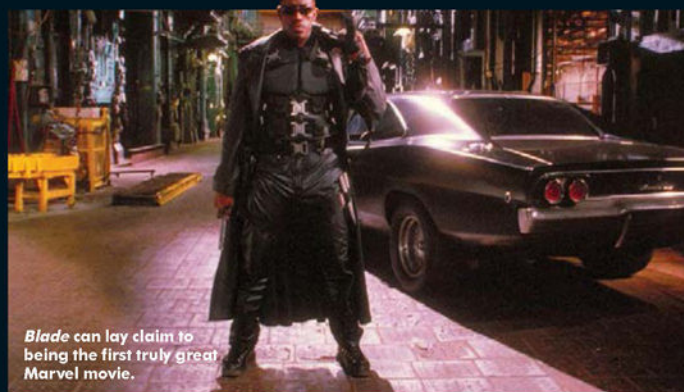
now a fifth dan black belt in Shotokan (a hardcore style of karate) and a second dan black belt in Hapkido (a highly eclectic Korean martial art). Wow, Snipes, wow.

Though *Blade* wasn't made by Marvel Studios, and pre-dates the Marvel Cinematic Universe, it's still technically Marvel. It was too good a concept for them to skip completely, so Marvel Studios' mother enterprise Marvel Entertainment acted as an on-the-side production company with New Line Cinema. There's also the whole thing of it being based on a Marvel character that ties it together.

Eric 'Blade' Brookes made his first appearance as a supporting character in the comic *The Tomb Of Dracula* in 1973. He was created by writer and artist team Marv Wolfman and Gene Colan, and went on to star and co-star in several other different comic-book series. In the early days, *Blade* was more of an everyman. He wasn't originally a vampire-human hybrid – he was a man that developed immunity to vampire bites. As a result, he didn't have



The success of *Blade* led to two further sequels.



Blade can lay claim to being the first truly great Marvel movie.

QUIPS AND GRAVY

The 5 best quip masters of comic book movies

MR FREEZE (BATMAN & ROBIN)



1 We all love a good pun anyway, but lines like "Tonight's forecast: a freeze is coming", "Ice to see you" and "Chill" bypass cheesy and become works of art. What more can we expect from Arnie?

THOR (THOR)



2 When he's in the right mood, everything that comes out of the God of Thunder's mouth is both beautiful and hilarious. It's that semi-Shakespearean repartee. It really gives him the winning edge over everyone else.

CATWOMAN (BATMAN RETURNS)



3 Selina Kyle's suggestive and pun-heavy quips often invoke a weird state of being between arousal and absolute terror, which is most likely what makes her so lethal. And we love it.



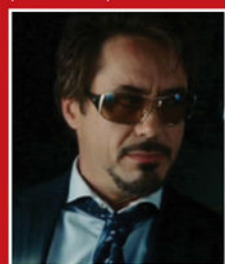
Refreshingly, it didn't stint on blood and gore like other adaptations.

the superhuman speed and strength he possesses in the film. He had to rely on his skill and wits until he was finally bitten by Morbius the Living Vampire, and become the Daywalker. His weapons were also a bit different, with Wolfman and Colan opting for teakwood knives and mahogany stakes, which he would use to impale his opponents. Later on, he acquired a larger arsenal consisting of a variety of bladed weapons like long swords and katanas, flamethrowers, and UV and silver-based weapons. But he still had the leather coat and shades.

Despite the huge impact Wolfman and Colan had on both Blade the character and *Blade* the franchise, the pair only received a 'based on the characters by' credit in the film. Wolfman subsequently sued Marvel Comics over ownership of *Blade*, but ultimately lost out. As a result, he and Colan weren't even mentioned in the credits of *Blade II*.

Also disappointingly, Stan Lee originally filmed a cameo as a cop in the bloodbath club scene, but it was deleted from the final cut. It would have been his second ever Marvel comic-book movie cameo after *The Trial Of The Incredible Hulk* in 1989. ☞

TONY STARK/IRON MAN (IRON MAN)



4 Tony Stark? More like Tony SNARK, amirite? Every word that comes out of his mouth, as Iron Man or the CEO of Stark Industries, is absolutely dripping in his usual sarcasm and irony.

DRAX THE DESTROYER (GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY)



5 The most hilarious member of the *Guardians Of The Galaxy* team, though perhaps unintentionally, Drax's greatest hits include "I'm not a princess" and "I would cut his head clean off".

Stephen Dorff takes on villain duties as Deacon Frost.



Kris Kristofferson plays Blade's mentor Whistler.

WATCH FIRST



THE TERMINATOR (1984)

Blade's costume, strut and intensity are all reminiscent of everyone's favourite cyborg assassin.

WATCH NEXT



WHAT WE DO IN THE SHADOWS (2014)

The film's vampires aren't as intense, but they are all Wesley Snipes fans.

YOUR TAKE ON THE CLASSIC

WHAT YOU THOUGHT @SCIFINOW



"At the time, it seems to come out of nowhere and was awesome - great set-up, great anti-hero and Snipes nailed it. Loved it!" @T...arck



"The movies? The first two are fantastic. Snipes' last really enjoyable films." @jeffbiscuits



"Excellent film with a great sequel and a so-so third movie." @quidditysea



"The best series. They started the trend of 'cool' and good superhero movies, not like *Iron Man*." @SpeedForce1973



"I've not seen it in a while but it was good." @Dianeofthedeath



"The Snipes movies? The best... started this Marvel Studios shit." @Wastedtheshow



"Fantastic movie with Snipes in his best ever roll. Oodles of visual style, can't believe S Norrington has quit movies!" @johnnyalucard



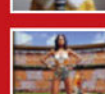
"I love it! One of the best vampire movies out there." @SongWarmonger



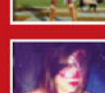
"The opening club scene is one of the best opening scenes ever IMHO." @TheAhmedRaafat



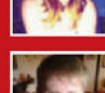
"Love it. Great film. Can you believe it's now 17 years old?!" @dept42



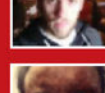
"One word: awesome." @gwoman9810



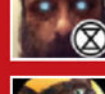
"Blade is a pretty iconic film, a film that I have and would re-watch." @Cascararogue



"I love the first, snuck in to see the sequel underaged and loved that too (even with some rosey CGI). Snipes at his best." @Kieferzoidy



"Blade contains the best Kris Kristofferson quote ever! You'll know when you hear it. #NSFW" @doctorfodder

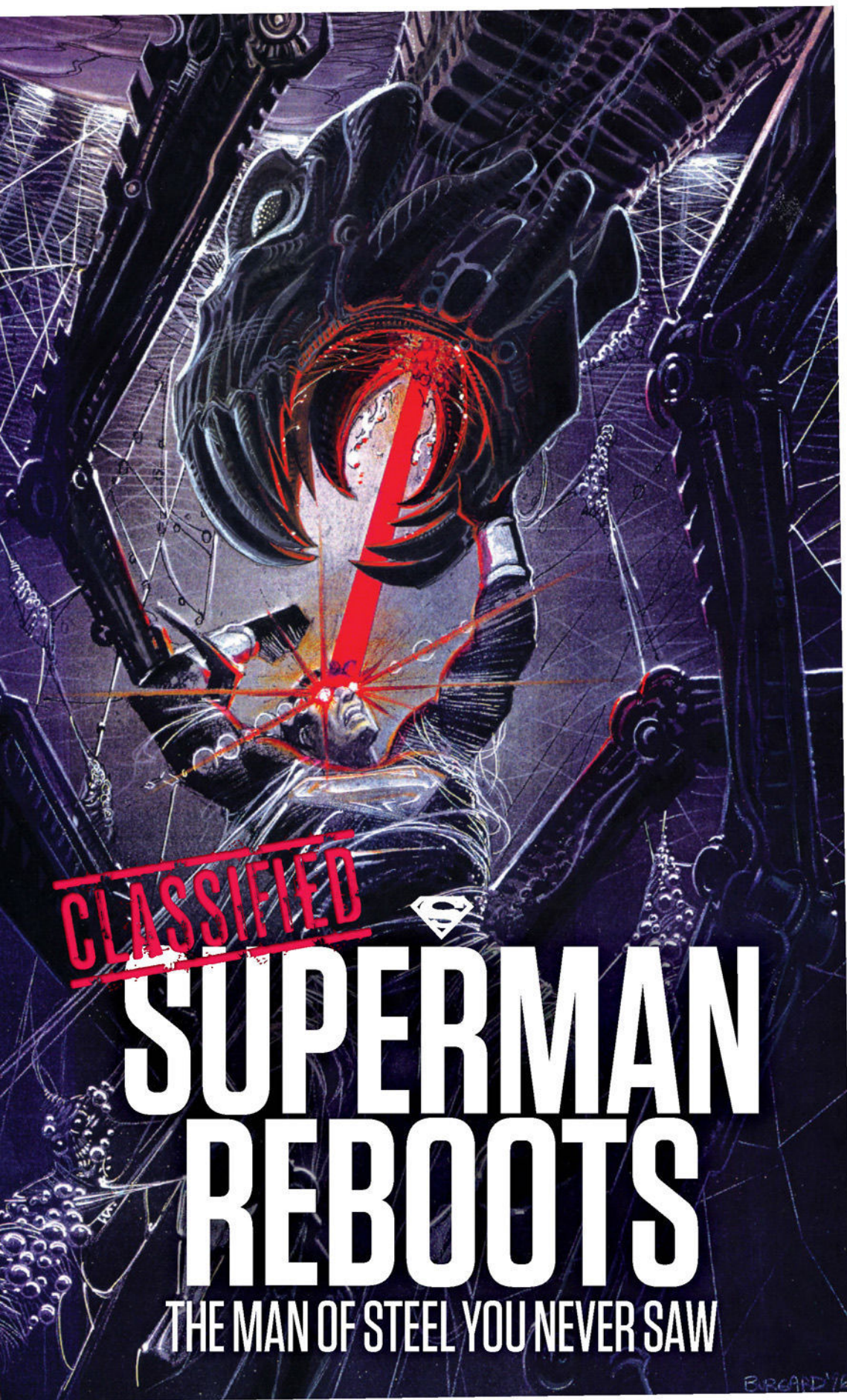


"Blade is awesome! We need more! Bring back Snipes, bring back Snipes, bring back Snipes!" @The_LizMarshall



"Loved it! Might have to go home and whack the trilogy on!" @ToniMarie1991





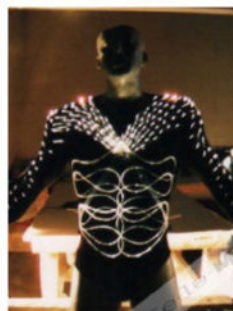
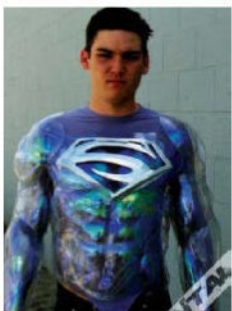
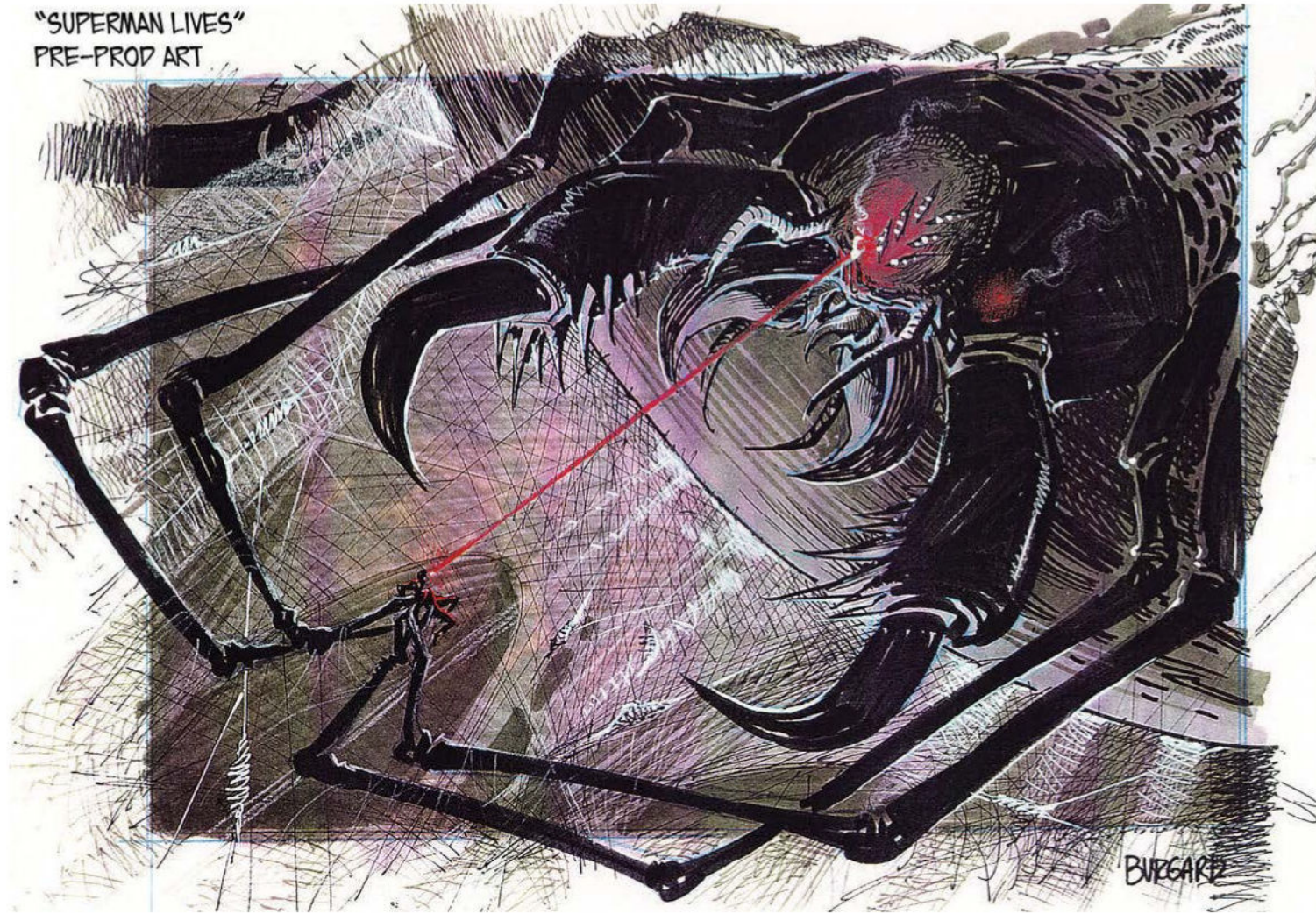
BETWEEN 1987'S *SUPERMAN IV: THE QUEST FOR PEACE* AND *SUPERMAN RETURNS* ENTERING PRODUCTION IN 2004, THE WORLD'S BEST-KNOWN SUPERHERO WAS TRAPPED IN A PHANTOM ZONE OF WELL-INTENDED BAD IDEAS. WE GO BEHIND THE SCENES WITH KEVIN SMITH, JJ ABRAMS, TIM BURTON AND NICOLAS CAGE TO UNCOVER THE BAFFLING STORY OF THE SUPERMAN MOVIES THAT NEVER CAME TO PASS...

The power of Superman is such that he managed to defeat the best efforts of JJ Abrams, McG, Nicolas Cage, Tim Burton, Brett Ratner, Brendan Fraser, William Wisher and Wolfgang Petersen – all among the filmmakers and actors that attempted to bring the Man of Steel to the big screen in the years between 1987's *Superman IV* and 2006's *Superman Returns*.

Part of the blame for the false starts can be laid at the feet of producer Jon Peters (who had achieved great success as the producer of Burton's 1989 *Batman* movie), whose notions of what a Superman film should be came into conflict with most of the people he worked with. In the various scripts there was a penchant for Superman (looking more *Matrix*-like in a black version of his uniform) to be stripped of his powers and forced to spend much of his time in a variety of armoured suits and vehicles to fight the films' bad guys, alternatively Lex Luthor, Doomsday, Brainiac or 'Lexiac'(!), with a fixation on giant spiders thrown in for good measure.

That was not a misprint: for much of the proposed films, Superman would reportedly be powerless, fighting crime via numerous gadgets that would have the cumulative effect of making the world safe for the initiation of a whole new toy line. "The revenue stream for *Batman* was greater for the toys than for the movie," says a source associated with the aborted attempts, who asked to remain nameless. "That's your answer. What were they up to then, the 99th *Batman* action figure? And they all sell. There was a very strong impetus from Peters to have a lot of things that could become toys. At one point he was talking about a character called the Eradicator, who he wanted to have a 'Eradicator Stick,' because he had images of posters and toys coming out of it. I'm not saying he was wrong by

"SUPERMAN LIVES"
PRE-PROD ART



Superman's 'birthing matrix' costume
by FX veteran Steve Johnson.

"SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO SUCCUMB TO THE STUPIDITY, LIKE HAVING BRAINIAC FIGHT POLAR BEARS IN THE ANTARCTIC"



KEVIN SMITH

any means. Any movie that is that expensive would have to be backstopped with a lot of different sources of revenue."

Writer Jonathan Lemkin (*Demolition Man*, *The Devil's Advocate*) was the first aboard the Krypton Express with 1993's *Superman Reborn*, his assignment being basically to "shake things up." He certainly delivered on that count, focusing the first part of the story on the relationship between Clark and Lois, including Superman's inability to give his alien heart over to a human woman. It is only after the battle with Doomsday, when he lies dying in her arms, that he comes to grips with his feelings for her.

"He literally dies as he professes his love to her," Lemkin explains, "and his life force jumps between them. Superman dies and Lois later finds out that she's pregnant immaculately. She gives birth to a child who grows 21 years in three weeks, and is essentially the resurrected Superman."

Recognising that the Superman mythos had strong parallels to Christianity, what with a celestial father sending his only son to Earth, Lemkin enjoyed dealing with the concept of an immaculate conception. "I thought it would be funny to piss off the far right," he smiles. "I think most people would have enjoyed the tongue-in-cheek quality of it. Look, Batman had nipples and a codpiece, for crying out loud!" Warners ultimately decided to go in a different direction, so they turned to screenwriter Gregory Poirier, who had previously collaborated with Peters on *Rosewood*. In his version, Superman is having a difficult time dealing with his status as an alien among humans. While coping with this, he has to go up against Brainiac and the creature Doomsday, which bleeds Kryptonite.

That one didn't go either, and the next writer given the keys to the Fortress was Kevin Smith, who has made no secret of the experience of working on

A SUPERMAN SPEAKS

Brendan Fraser on McG and JJ Abrams' *Superman Flyby*



Brendan Fraser tried on the costume, and was in the running to play the Man of Steel in JJ Abrams' *Superman Flyby*, to be directed by McG.

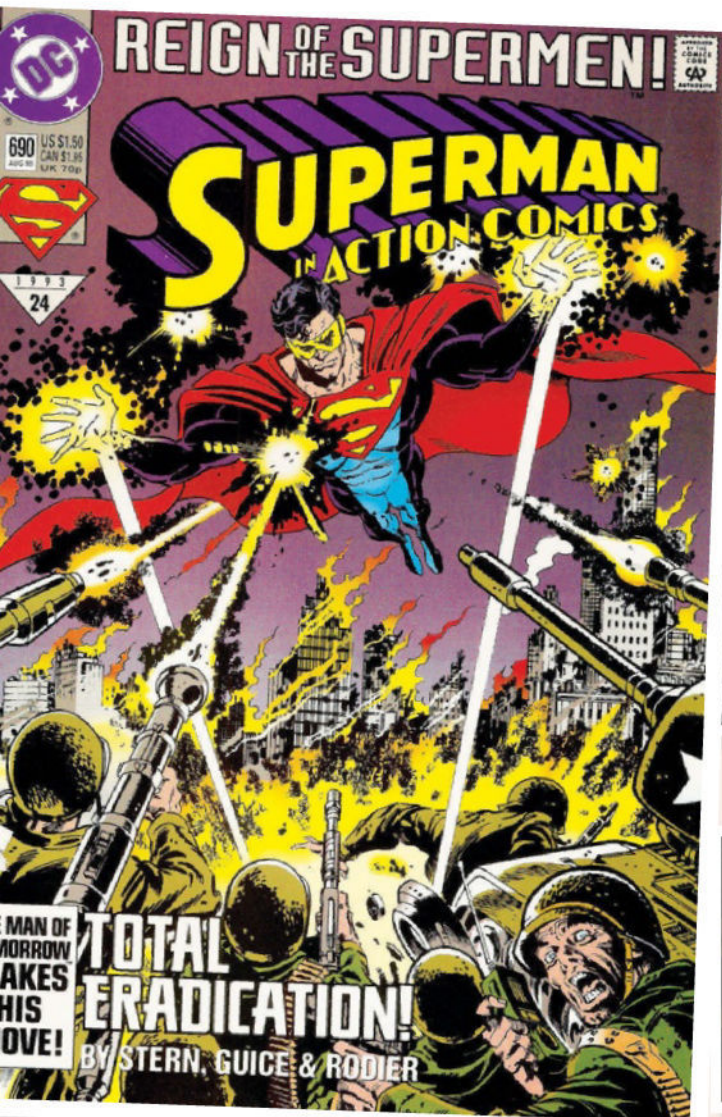
"In my view, the script was far superior – and I mean no disrespect – to the story Bryan Singer told in *Superman Returns*. JJ Abrams had a vision that was larger; it spanned galaxies. It was like a third World War on Earth involving different planets, universes and brothers, sibling rivalry and the collision of enormous superpowers. That's how good JJ is. We had lunch after everything, kind of a post-

"JJ ABRAMS HAD A VISION THAT WAS LARGER; IT SPANNED GALAXIES"
BRENDAN FRASER

mortem after his version never got shot. A week later, he tells me he's in Hawaii doing *Lost*, which opens to astronomical numbers. Things happen for a reason. I remember thinking at the time, when that opportunity arose, that there was just so much expectation surrounding it. When I saw what Brandon Routh did with it and, again, I say this with respect, I didn't know him from a bar of soap, and thought he was great. He acted the role great, and in the end I just wondered, is there an audience for Superman?"



TIM BURGARD '96



Test costumes were put together with Cage in mind ↘



➤ that project. He had come to Warner Bros to talk about a few projects, and the one that he ultimately latched on to was Superman – mostly because of his honesty concerning Poirier's script, which, he felt, represented a writer "out of his depth," demonstrating little knowledge of the Superman character or comic-books in general. Smith was offered the opportunity to voice his opinion in a meeting with Warner executives, after which he was given the assignment.

"Eventually," he explains, "I met with [Warner's] Lorenzo di Bonaventura – a great guy, a smart guy. And Jon Peters, who isn't a really great or smart guy. I was fascinated by meeting Jon, though, because this was the guy who produced *Batman*, and to hear him tell the story, you wouldn't think that Tim Burton meant anything to *Batman*. He says stuff like, 'You know the reason that *Batman* worked? You know that alleyway scene where he's fighting those sword-bearing guys and they're attacking him? Those guys were real swordsmen; that's why that movie made like \$300 million.' I was like, 'Oh, really? All you need is real swordsmen to make a film such a hit?' But both of them dug on me, I guess. Jon's take was more from the gut than anything else, and way off base, too. He said, 'You know why you and me are going to get this project right and make a great movie? Because you and me understand Superman; we're from the streets.' I was like, 'You were a hairdresser once; I'm from the suburbs. Neither of us are from the streets.'

"I got along with Peters most of the time, even though he did have kooky ideas, and sometimes you had to rein him in and say, 'You don't want to

"JON PETERS WAS LIKE, 'I DON'T WANT TO SEE HIM FLY. LOOK AT THE OLD MOVIES, HE LOOKS TERRIBLE'"

KEVIN SMITH

do that.' But sometimes you have to succumb to the stupidity, like having Brainiac fight polar bears in the Antarctic when he goes to the Fortress of Solitude. It's embarrassing. He was always saying that Brainiac should give Luthor a space dog, something from that menagerie of his. He gives Luthor a dog; Luthor is afraid of the dog, and the dog hates him. I'm like, 'It doesn't really lend to the story, why do you want that?' 'Because I need a Chewie.' This was during the time of *Star Wars* re-release, and he said, 'Chewie's cuddly, man. You could make a toy out of him, so you've got to give me a dog.' It's something I fought the whole time, and finally I guess I won him over with, 'Look, Jon, you don't need a Chewie.' He's forever influenced by the things he's seen."

Unfortunately for Smith, Peters was continually changing things and influencing the direction of the story. "For instance," he details, "initially the fight with Doomsday was a huge epic. We altered it because Jon was like, 'They have to fight in the subways and in the sewers. We've got to get down in the sewer.' Go figure. The whole movie takes place in darkness; can't we see this fight in the light of day of Metropolis? What do you want to bring him down in the muck for? Plus, then we have to cut above to see what's going on, but he ➤



THE ART OF SUPERMAN LIVES

CONCEPT ARTIST TIM BURGARD ON GIANT SPIDERS, KEVIN SMITH AND THE DEATH OF SUPERMAN

How did you get involved in *Superman Lives*?

I had an agent that was approached, and based on my samples I was hired to work for Jon Peters, the executive producer of the Superman and Batman franchises. To their credit, as much as they were trying to do Superman without actually making him recognisable, Jon and company were trying to show the money people at Warner how cool it would be to have Superman fight something besides another guy in spandex or the same old bald dude.

How closely did you work with Smith and Peters?

I worked with a duo of in-house special effects producers who had previously worked on *Space Jam*. For research I visited Rick Baker's studio to see this enormous praying mantis alien he did for the hell of it. I had no more than three meetings with Jon, one of which Smith was part of, but barely said

anything. That was the meeting where my alien spider design was described by Peters as looking like "something he had for lunch." His solution was to put something resembling a human face on it, which I did despite how wrong I thought he was. After all, what's more alien than a human face?

"THE BLUE AND RED SUIT WAS DEEMED 'TOO GAY'"

TIM BURGARD

What sort of direction were you given?

This scene is the climax and is meant to be scary – I was thinking *Alien* via giant spider. The toughest direction was to minimise showing Superman, even though he had to be featured in the artwork, and never show him in blue and red (deemed "too gay" by the kids Jon used as market research). As a compromise I used the outfit he wears after he is resurrected in *The Death Of Superman* comic.

How did you find out *Superman Lives* wasn't happening?

I was kinda hoping I would have an inside track to work on it when it went into production. I had worked for (but not with) Tim Burton on *Mars Attacks!* but I knew he had a favourite board artist that wasn't available at that time. Still, I hoped I

was in the club. Apparently not. I knew as much about it as the general public at the time.

What appealed to you about this take on the character?

The storyline seemed exciting, but I believe that Nicolas Cage was attached even back then, which I was not looking forward to. It would have been interesting to have Superman interacting with more of the DC Universe, and Brainiac should have been used way before the third and fourth appearance of Luthor.

Find out more about Tim Burgard's work at www.timburgardart.com.

THE LOST SUPERMAN MOVIES



Everything you need to know about the Superman reboots you didn't see

SUPERMAN V: REBORN (1993-1995)

Director: None **Writers:** Jonathan Lemkin, Gregory Poirer
Wildest casting: None

1 Synopsis: While Superman and Lois grapple with their relationship, Doomsday arrives, resulting in the death of the Man of Steel

and, ultimately, the transference of his life force to Lois. This leads to an immaculate conception and the birth/rapid

growing of a reborn Superman. In Poirer's rewrite, Brainiac, Parasite and Silver Banshee are added into the mix.

SUPERMAN LIVES (1996-2000)

Director: Tim Burton **Writers:** Kevin Smith, Wesley Strick, Dan Gilroy **Wildest casting:** Nicolas Cage (cast as Superman), Tim Allen (approached for Brainiac), Kevin Spacey (approached for Lex Luthor)

2 In Smith's script, Brainiac sends Doomsday to kill Superman while blocking the sun and draining Supes of his powers. Killed in battle, Superman is resurrected by a Kryptonian robot named The

Eradicator. At the same time, Brainiac teams up with Luthor. Strick's rewrite adds the element of Superman coping with his alien nature, along with Brainiac and Luthor joining their

forms to become a being known as 'Lexiac'. This time, Superman is resurrected by the spirit of Krypton.

In Gilroy's third draft, Brainiac destroys Krypton and pursues Kal-El to Earth.

BATMAN VERSUS SUPERMAN (2002)

Director: McG (dropped out), Wolfgang Petersen
Writers: Andrew Kevin Walker, Paul Attanasio, Akiva Goldsman
Wildest casting: Will Smith (approached for Superman)

3 For a time, the idea of a Superman project was put into development in its place, to be

directed by *Das Boot*'s Wolfgang Petersen. Dealing with older versions of the characters – Robin, Alfred and Gordon are dead,

while Superman and Lois are divorced – Lex Luthor comes up with a plan to make Batman and Superman destroy each other.

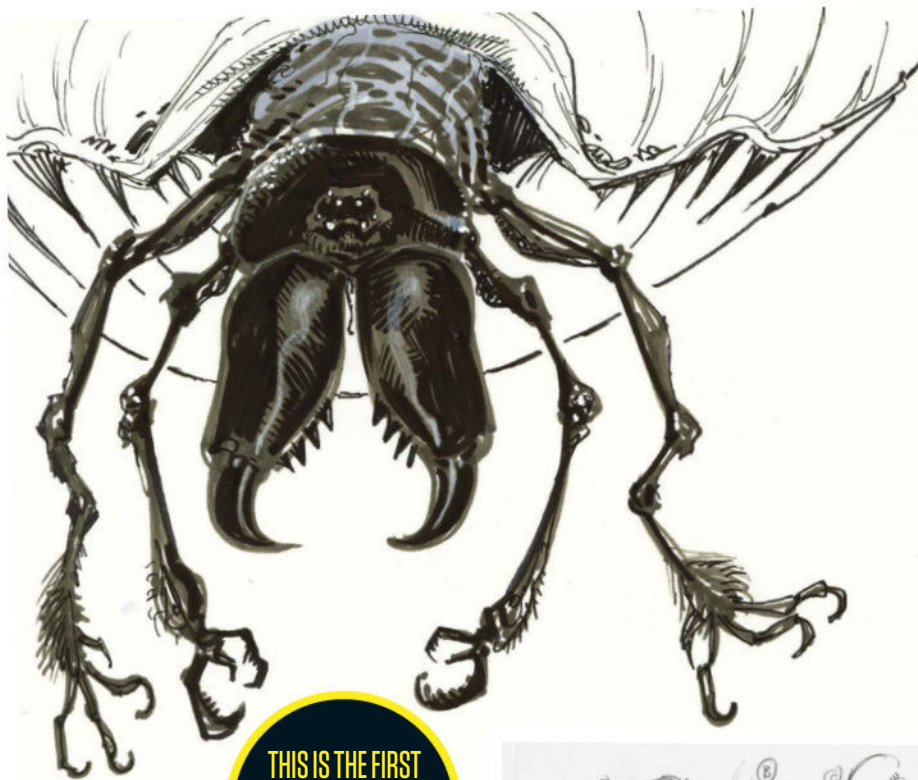
SUPERMAN FLYBY (2002-2004)

Director: Brett Ratner (dropped out), McG, Bryan Singer (project became *Superman Returns*)
Writers: JJ Abrams, Josh Schwartz
Wildest casting: Josh Hartnett (approached for Superman), Jude Law (approached for Superman), Christopher Walken (approached for Perry White), Shia LaBeouf (approached for Jimmy Olsen), Scarlett Johansson (approached for Lois Lane), Johnny Depp (approached for Lex Luthor)

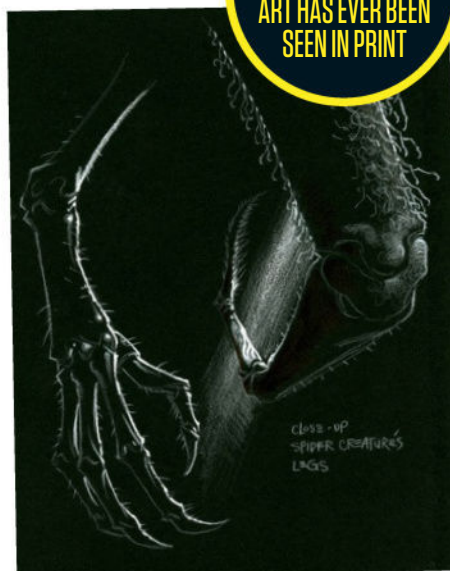
4 Krypton survives and Kal-El, raised on Earth and becoming

Superman, finds himself a central figure in a growing civil war on his

homeworld, with his adopted planet potentially standing as collateral damage.



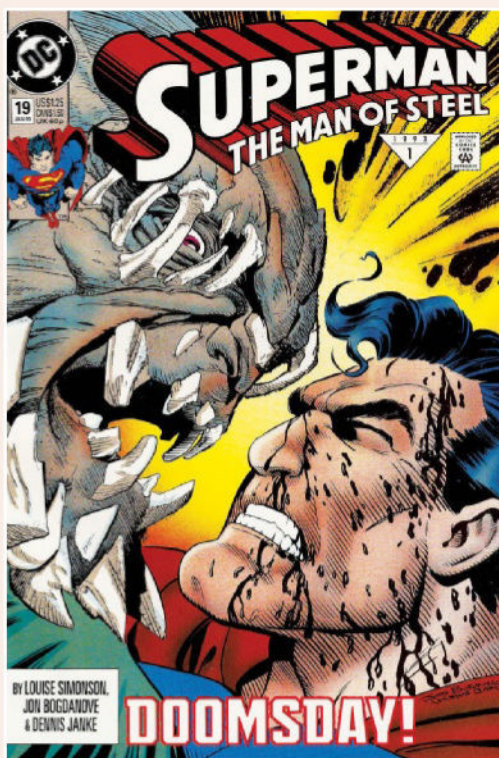
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME MUCH OF THIS ART HAS EVER BEEN SEEN IN PRINT



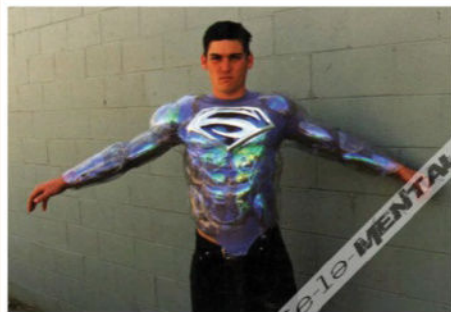
Tim Burgard's unseen character studies of the giant spider



Johnson's comic-inspired 'birthing matrix' costume would only have been worn in one scene.



↪ The character's death at the hands of Doomsday and his subsequent rebirth in an arc that ran across all Superman comics in 1992 and 1993 was a huge influence on the movies in production in that period.



"THIS PROJECT WAS VERY IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT WOULD AFFECT CHILDREN AROUND THE WORLD"

NICOLAS CAGE



➤ still wanted them covered in muck and shit, because Jon hated the suit. Jon hates Superman's suit. He's always talking about the costume being too pink; that he didn't want to see him in the suit.

Which begs the question: why the hell make a Superman movie in the first place? "It goes beyond that," says an exasperated Smith. "Jon Peters was like, 'I don't want to see him fly. Look at those old movies where he's flying around with Lois Lane, it looks terrible. I don't want to see this guy flying.' So I'm like, 'Jon, you don't want him in the suit and you don't want him flying. You want to make Batman. You want a dark suit and you want a guy who can't fly, because that's not this character. This character is widely known for flying and for wearing those colours.'"

Smith's departure from the project pretty much coincided with the arrival of Burton as director, deciding to bring aboard Wesley Strick to rewrite the screenplay. At the same time, Nicolas Cage was signed for what would be a very different take on the Man of Steel, the trio looking to explore for the first time the idea that Superman is an alien among humans.

"On occasion," Cage says, "I've tried to make movies that make a difference. I think *City Of Angels* is one of them. If you really want to make a difference, if you really want to do something positive for the world, you've got to start with an impressionable age. I've never really made a movie for children before, but to me, *Superman* was an opportunity to reach children all around the

world, and to say something to them that I believe. I guess I'm trying to take the judgment out of the way kids treat each other. To me, this project was very important because it would affect children around the world. What do I want to see happen to children around the world? I can't claim that I really would be able to do this, but at least wanted to try. Which is if I could play up to Superman's feelings of being an alien, feeling different, feeling weird, basically feeling like the kid I felt like when I was in school, then I could maybe get that little boy to stop teasing that little boy because Superman is different. That was my thought process. Maybe that's a little too weighty, but at least it's positive."

But the project fell apart yet again with the arrival and departure of Strick, Dan Gilroy, spec writer Alex Ford and William Wisher. Finally, Burton himself left to direct *Sleepy Hollow*. Yet the project still refused to fade away, with Brett Ratner and McG being mooted as possible directors, and in 2002 JJ Abrams was brought in to write a screenplay called *Superman Flyby*, which in some ways was pretty radical in its first draft, in which Krypton survives and Lex Luthor is revealed to be a Kryptonian.

"What was wonderful about working on *Superman* is that as a kid I was the biggest fan," enthuses Abrams. "After a lot of years of trying to get this going and not succeeding, everyone was coming at it with a very fresh, open mind. What was exciting for me is that we had some incredible, really big ideas that go beyond just ➤

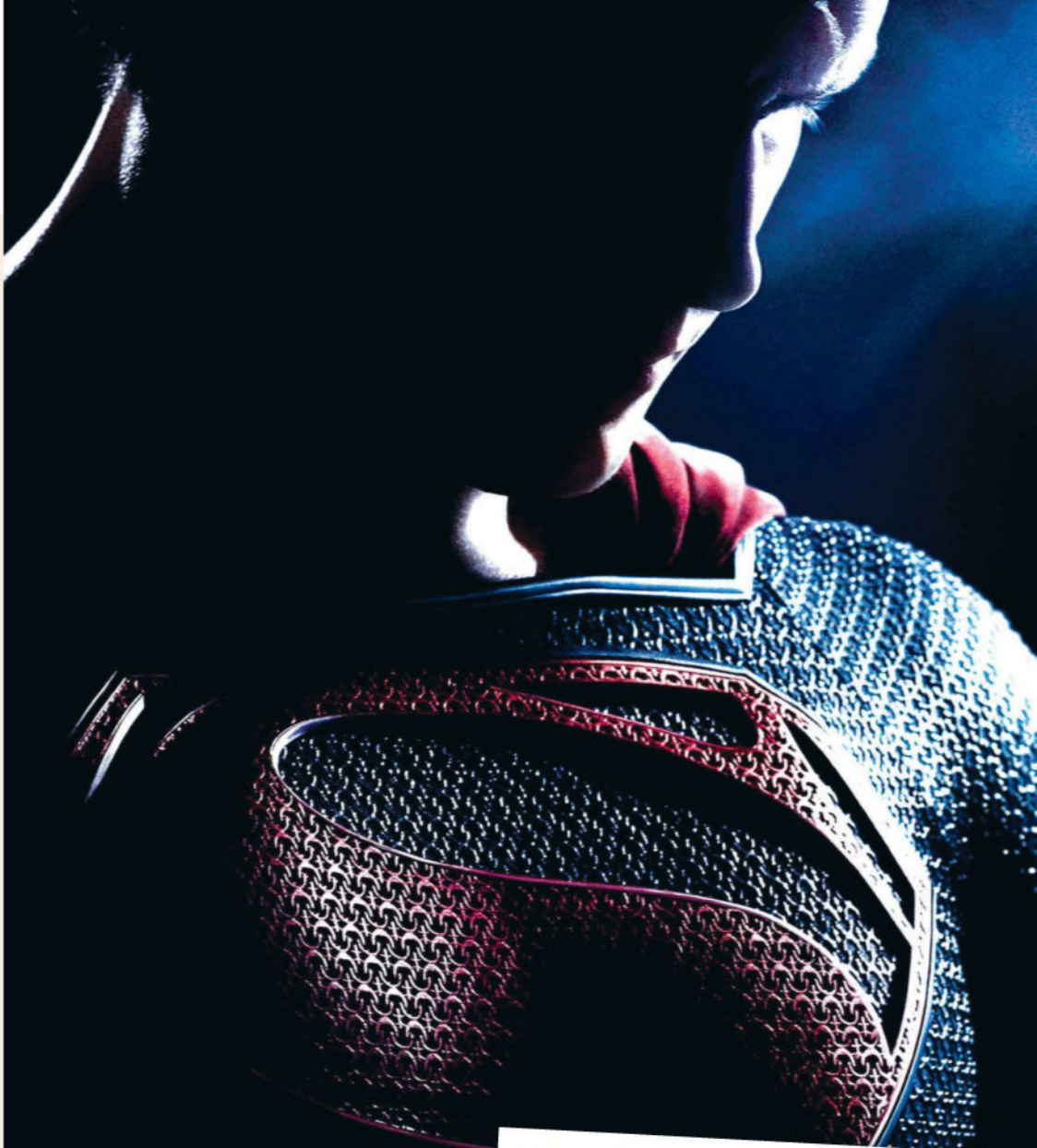


Brainiac's first appearance in *Action Comics* #242 (1958)

➤ the one story we were telling. *Alias* at the time had actually been an amazing training ground for me. In this *Superman* we were talking a lot about where he's come from and where he's going. There were a lot of exciting, big ideas. I think it was Superman for everyone and not just for people who already know the character. It was for the uninitiated. This was a retelling of Superman; you had to go fresh and not look at this as the next sequel to the Christopher Reeve films. You want to do a Superman movie that will be satisfying. I'm so sick of going to big blockbuster movies and leaving feeling like I died a little bit, like, 'Oh my God, how disappointing was that?' What's so exciting for us is that we were approaching this thing knowing and feeling the kind of movie that as kids we used to see. I feel that we were going to try as hard as we could to make this a satisfying experience."

McG admits that his approach would have been to take things in a different direction. "I think Superman is a great character," he points out, "but I would have wanted to make the character infinitely more dark and complicated, get away from the Big Blue Boy Scout a little bit and more into the alien among us, and how that could be lonely and interesting. It's not that I would make it depressing, I would just make it a little tougher, which I suspect people would have responded to."

"Look," interjects Smith, "there is no definitive version of Superman. The character has been around for so long and nobody has been able to define him. No one has been able to say, 'No other version of Superman will be as good as mine.' That's the wonderful thing about the character: he can come into the hands of somebody, and something rich, wonderful and new can happen with it. For me, it wasn't about doing the be-all, end-all; I just wanted to endeavour to do half the job that the guys in the comics have been doing for years. If I could have done that, if I could have gotten some of that magic up on the screen, that feeling you get when you read comics, then that would have been good. You're



"I'M SICK OF GOING TO BIG BLOCKBUSTER MOVIES AND FEELING LIKE I DIED A LITTLE BIT"

JJ ABRAMS

taking a trip; it's definitely escapist fantasy, but you make those characters real enough that you can believe that a man can fly.

"It's a great process to be involved in," he reflects, "because you see what happens and you see what's wrong with the system. You watch these superhero movies and say, 'How did they fuck up that character? How come they can't do it right?' This is why they can't: because it's filmmaking by committee. I understand there are certain needs; I understand that they have merchandising rights and there's a pile of cash to be made, but there's nothing saying you can't make a movie really good at the same time." ☞

The Superman Movie Anthology is out now on DVD and Blu-ray



©Steve Johnson

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO SUPERMAN LIVES?



BEST KNOWN AS A DIRECTOR OF ANIMATION, JON SCHNEPP (METALOCALYPSE, VENTURE BROS) TURNED HIS ATTENTION TO LIVE ACTION FOR ONE REASON: TO DISCOVER THE INCREDIBLE TRUE STORY BEHIND TIM BURTON'S UNMADE MAN OF STEEL REBOOT, SUPERMAN LIVES. FUNDED ON KICKSTARTER IN MARCH 2013, SCHNEPP FILMED INTERVIEWS WITH BURTON, WRITER KEVIN SMITH AND THE DEATH OF SUPERMAN LIVES: WHAT HAPPENED? IS DUE FOR RELEASE IN MAY 2015...

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THE STORY OF SUPERMAN LIVES?

Back when it was first announced, it seemed like it would be a really adventurous take on the Man of Steel. Getting Tim Burton and Nicolas Cage seemed very inspired to me, and just what the character needed in the feature film world. I am of the mind that this film would have been creatively successful, as well as a box office hit. The character needed to be rebooted, and not by going backwards, but forwards, with a new interpretation.

ONCE THE KICKSTARTER ENDED, WHAT WERE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES?

The biggest challenge I've found, after successfully getting funded through Kickstarter, has been getting in contact with all the various people who have been involved in the project from almost 15 years ago. I've had to learn to be very very patient in getting returned responses from many people, and gaining their trust in

being involved in the documentary. It has taken almost twice as long as I thought it would, and overall, I wouldn't change the way it has happened, because this project really has been one of discovery for me, and everything has come to me very organically. The best part of going on this archeological journey has been not only finding amazing new artwork and designs, but also sharing the different insights with the crew from 15 years ago, as they remember their own work and see how it all informed each others work.

DID YOU GET ACCESS TO ANY RESOURCES YOU WEREN'T ANTICIPATING?

The greatest resource has been getting Tim Burton to become involved and not only to be interviewed for the doc, but to get his blessing, alongside with his producer Derek



Frey. Once they came onboard, this opened up many of Tim's core team to feel comfortable in talking with me and being interviewed for the documentary, including production designer Rick Heinrichs and costume designer Colleen Atwood. Also, Tim has been very open with sharing his designs and visions for what his version of Superman would have been.

WAS ANYTHING TIM SAID A PARTICULAR REVELATION?

Tim was very open with me in describing not only his interpretation of the classic DC superhero, but his take on what it would be like to be an alien alone on this planet, to have the power of flight and to visually show that in a new way, and ultimately what he was trying to do, which was show us something we haven't seen already, and to give us a new spin on the Superman character and the way he was perceived at the time.

Having seen so much more behind the scenes artwork and set designs, talking about the possible casting of actors, and delving into the groups overall momentum before it was shut down, I am convinced this would have been one of the coolest science fiction fantasy films ever made.

WHAT SORT OF RELEASE ARE YOU WORKING TOWARDS?

I'm shooting for a late 2014 release. I'm still going to try to raise the money to make certain recreation scenes

form the various scripts, and having uncovered even more amazing designs and production art, I'm really hoping I can add this to the already great interviews I've been getting.

Documentaries are a completely different beast than I'm used to, coming from directing cartoons and live action with scripts and a production schedule. This is lots of planning, and waiting, and setting up interviews weeks and months in advance. This has been a new and overall fantastically fulfilling journey for me, and I'm looking forward to sharing it with you all.



Jon Schnepf with *Superman Lives* director Tim Burton.



Find out more about *The Death Of Superman Lives: What Happened?* at www.facebook.com/TheDeathOfSupermanLivesWhatHappened?

2000
to 2007

THE SILVER AGE OF SUPERHERO MOVIES

With Bryan Singer's *X-Men* and Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man*, two of Marvel's biggest hitters show just how the modern superhero should be, prompting a wave of imitators and eventually the end of the classic franchises with *X-Men: The Last Stand* and *Spider-Man 3*. Quietly, on the sidelines, Christopher Nolan kicks off a street-level guerrilla war with *Batman Begins*...

FEATURED: PAGE 86 X-MEN

DIRECTOR: Bryan Singer
CAST: Patrick Stewart, Hugh Jackman, Ian McKellen

RELEASED: 14 July 2000

● It's well-formed, sure, and the effects still dazzle, but it's too much of a brochure of what was supposed to follow than an adventure in its own right.

VERDICT ★★★★★

THE SPECIALS

DIRECTOR: Craig Mazin
CAST: Rob Lowe, Thomas Haden Church, Paget Brewster

RELEASED: 18 September 2000

● With a script from future *Guardians Of The Galaxy* director James Gunn, this low-budget mockumentary is sweet and satirical in equal measure.

VERDICT ★★★★★

UNBREAKABLE

DIRECTOR: Bryan Singer
CAST: Bruce Willis, Samuel L. Jackson, Robin Wright

RELEASED: 22 November 2000

● A superhero movie by stealth, *M Night Shyamalan* not only offers up his best movie since *The Sixth Sense*, but a clever deconstruction of comic-book lore disguised as a thriller.

VERDICT ★★★★★

FEATURED: PAGE 92 SPIDER-MAN

DIRECTOR: Sam Raimi
CAST: Tobey Maguire, Kirsten Dunst, Willem Dafoe

RELEASED: 3 May 2002

● Warm, big-hearted and self-aware, Sam Raimi reveals the potential of comic-book movies just as skilfully as he distils the enduring appeal of Spidey into a rooftop-leaping romp with a hapless Tobey Maguire in the lead.

VERDICT ★★★★★

BLADE II

DIRECTOR: Guillermo del Toro
CAST: Wesley Snipes, Kris Kristofferson, Ron Perlman

RELEASED: 22 March 2002

● Del Toro brings plenty of his own baggage, but rather than derailing the franchise, it reinvigorates it as an action/horror hybrid better suited to its comic book origins, setting the stage for *Hellboy*.

VERDICT ★★★★★

DAREDEVIL

DIRECTOR: Mark Steven Johnson
CAST: Ben Affleck, Jennifer Garner, Colin Farrell

RELEASED: 14 February 2003

● A nu-metal inflicted Spidey clone to a point, *Daredevil* fumbles the source, but nails the brooding tone with some rare moments of idiosyncratic brilliance amid the music-video set pieces.

VERDICT ★★★★★

X2: X-MEN UNITED

DIRECTOR: Bryan Singer
CAST: Patrick Stewart, Hugh Jackman, Halle Berry

RELEASED: 2 May 2003

● Though it hoards most of the series' highlights (teleport kung-fu, the attack on the mansion), its good work is nearly ruined by a directionless second half and frustrating character arcs.

VERDICT ★★★★★

BATMAN

HULK

DIRECTOR: Ang Lee
CAST: Eric Bana, Jennifer Connelly, Sam Elliott

RELEASED: 20 June 2003

● Ang Lee pours demonstrable passion into *Hulk*, his visual tics and tank-lobbing set pieces neatly mirroring the comic-book origins. Sadly, the clever direction is vastly more interesting than the plot.

VERDICT ★★★★★



HELLBOY

the mythology we recognise, and that's probably for the best – this flesh-flashing Razzie-bait is not our Catwoman.

VERDICT ★★★★★

THE INCREDIBLES

DIRECTOR: Brad Bird
CAST: Craig T Nelson, Samuel L Jackson, Holly Hunter

RELEASED: 8 December 2004

● Pixar's sweet and smart *The Incredibles* not only steals a few gags from *Watchmen*, but thumbs its nose at Marvel too by getting an infinitely more enjoyable family of superhero archetypes on screen than *Fantastic Four*.

VERDICT ★★★★★

BLADE: TRINITY

DIRECTOR: David S Goyer
CAST: Wesley Snipes, Ryan Reynolds, Jessica Biel

RELEASED: 8 December 2004

● The trend-bucking quasi-superhero action series finally circles the drain with a premise so hokey (and therefore comic-book faithful) that Abbot & Costello would have probably signed up – it's Wesley Snipes versus Dracula!

VERDICT ★★★★★

ELEKTRA

DIRECTOR: Rob Bowman
CAST: Jennifer Garner, Goran Visnjic, Will Yun Lee

RELEASED: 14 January 2005

● Jennifer Garner's absurd solo outing trowels on mysticism and mythology like clotted cream, before undermining it at every turn with music-video strutting and beat-em-up videogame idiocy masquerading as story.

VERDICT ★★★★★

FEATURED: PAGE 100 BATMAN BEGINS

DIRECTOR: Christopher Nolan
CAST: Christian Bale, Michael Caine, Liam Neeson

RELEASED: 15 June 2005

● Brilliantly cast and sublimely shot, *Batman Begins* is an understated turning point for the genre that takes another half decade to really shake the superhero status quo.

VERDICT ★★★★★

FANTASTIC FOUR

DIRECTOR: Tim Story
CAST: Ioan Gruffudd, Jessica Alba, Chris Evans

RELEASED: 8 July 2005

● Ultimately harmless, *Fantastic Four* is last decade's brand of superhero movie on a farewell tour. Big, bright and basic, it's hard to love but impossible to hate.

VERDICT ★★★★★

FEATURED: PAGE 96 HELLBOY

DIRECTOR: Guillermo del Toro
CAST: Ron Perlman, Doug Jones, Selma Blair

RELEASED: 2 April 2004

● Blending the pulp of *The Rocketeer* with the clock-punk weirdness of del Toro's own devising, *Hellboy* is a bespoke indie delight amid the free-for-all churn of Marvel's second-tier licenses.

VERDICT ★★★★★

THE PUNISHER

DIRECTOR: Jonathan Hensleigh
CAST: Thomas Jane, John Travolta, Samantha Mathis

RELEASED: 16 April 2004

● Garth Ennis's *Welcome Back Frank* is mined for all of its comic-book goofiness, but with none of the tone, resulting in an over-lit origin story that blends high camp with a body count.

VERDICT ★★★★★

SPIDER-MAN 2

DIRECTOR: Sam Raimi
CAST: Tobey Maguire, Kirsten Dunst, Alfred Molina

RELEASED: 30 June 2004

● Green Goblin might be the classic nemesis, but it's always been Doc Ock who provides the most fun, and Raimi's eight-legged rollercoaster delivers as only he knows how.

VERDICT ★★★★★

CATWOMAN

DIRECTOR: Pitof
CAST: Halle Berry, Sharon Stone, Benjamin Bratt

RELEASED: 23 July 2004

● The death rattle of the original *Batman* film franchise is like no take on

SKY HIGH

DIRECTOR: Bryan Singer
CAST: Kurt Russell, Kelly Preston, Michael Angarano

RELEASED: 25 July 2005

● Overlooked due to its family friendly origins, big-hearted Saturday afternoon comedy *Sky High* blends the warmth of *The Incredibles* with – of all things – the meta-textual awareness of *Watchmen*.

VERDICT ★★★★★

X-MEN: THE LAST STAND

DIRECTOR: Brett Ratner
CAST: Patrick Stewart, Hugh Jackman, Halle Berry

RELEASED: 26 May 2006

● A chaotic, overblown but wildly spectacular bookend, *X-Men: The Last Stand* is arguably the most superficially enjoyable of the bunch, but nevertheless hugely underwhelming.

VERDICT ★★★★★

SUPERMAN RETURNS

DIRECTOR: Bryan Singer
CAST: Brandon Routh, Kevin Spacey, Kate Bosworth

RELEASED: 28 June 2006

● A misty-eyed homage to Richard Donner-era *Superman*, *Superman Returns* is strangely cold and sterile, helped no end by a lack of real villains – unless you count the concept of gravity.

VERDICT ★★★★★

GHOST RIDER

DIRECTOR: Mark Steven Johnson
CAST: Nicolas Cage, Eva Mendes, Peter Fonda

RELEASED: 16 February 2007

● With a flat romantic subplot and an unintentionally funny script, *Ghost Rider* is throwaway B-movie trash, lacking the wit, intelligence and sheer excitement of the best comic-book movies.

VERDICT ★★★★★

SPIDER-MAN 3

DIRECTOR: Sam Raimi
CAST: Tobey Maguire, Kirsten Dunst, Alfred Molina

RELEASED: 30 June 2007

● This Marvel adaptation heartlessly plods its way through every one of its uninspired scenes, with even the few pleasures of the first film – such as Chris Evans's performance – completely mismanaged.

VERDICT ★★★★★

THE SILVER AGE



X-MEN

SPIDER-MAN 3

DIRECTOR: Sam Raimi
CAST: Tobey Maguire, Kirsten Dunst, Tophir Grace

RELEASED: 4 May 2007

● For each misjudged moment – the ridiculous swaying of Harry by a speech from his butler is the worst scene in the series – there's a franchise-topping jolt of pure exhilaration, like the vertigo-inducing rescue of Gwen Stacy.

VERDICT ★★★★★

FANTASTIC 4: RISE OF THE SILVER SUFER

DIRECTOR: Tim Story
CAST: Ioan Gruffudd, Jessica Alba, Chris Evans

RELEASED: 15 June 2007

● This Marvel adaptation heartlessly plods its way through every one of its uninspired scenes, with even the few pleasures of the first film – such as Chris Evans's performance – completely mismanaged.

VERDICT ★★★★★



HOW
BRYAN
SINGER'S X-MEN
CHANGED THE
SUPERHERO
MOVIE

SPLITTING

SAM RAIMI'S SPIDER-MAN MAY HAVE SPAWNED THE IMITATORS, BUT IT WAS BRYAN SINGER'S X-MEN THAT PROVED SUPERHERO MOVIES COULD RESONATE WITH THE MODERN AUDIENCE. WE SPEAK TO SINGER, HIS STARS AND HIS PRODUCERS TO DISCOVER HOW MARVEL'S STRANGEST TEENS SPAWNED A NEW WAVE OF SUPER-POWERED MOVIE MAKING...



There is a clear delineation in the history of comic-book movies, a sub-genre that essentially got its start with 1920's *The Mark Of Zorro* and genuinely came into its own in 2000 with Bryan Singer's *X-Men*. Along the way there were significant advances – most notably in the form of 1978's *Superman: The Movie* and 1989's *Batman*, with a helpful assist from 1998's *Blade* – but it was those first two *X-Men* films that drew a line in the cinematic sand.

Part of the importance of those films can be found in the casting of such critically acclaimed actors as

THE ATOM

Ian McKellen, Patrick Stewart and Brian Cox, a trio who would seemingly be more at home bringing the characters of William Shakespeare to life than those of Stan Lee. Yet there they were, joined by Anna Paquin, Academy Award-winner Halle Berry and franchise perennial favourite Hugh Jackman, among others.

"I think we provided dimension," says Cox, who played William Stryker in *X2*, "and I think these kinds of movies require dimension. Bryan Singer is very passionate about these films. He doesn't treat them lightly, and he sees each of them as very much a part of the whole."

He pauses, searching within his own mind for understanding of why Singer cares so deeply about

these films. "Bryan is Jewish," he says finally, "and there's a certain understanding of feeling marginal, which is really what the mutant thing is all about for him. There's a lot of allegory in what he's doing. I think when Stan Lee wrote it, because there are so many elements to these mutants, it was very complicated. It isn't just Spider-Man against the world or Superman against the world; it's a series of people who have personality enhancements which have to do with effective elements of their personalities, as it were."

"I think Bryan has a very strong sense of the allegorical nature of it. That's why he treats them with the same kind of mystery that he treats something like *The Usual Suspects*. They're like puzzles in a

way; they're quite complex. The narrative is very straightforward, but you realise there are a lot of layers to it. It makes it easier from an actor's point of view, because you know that you're working in real territory and it's not just a question of hitting your marks."

Right from the beginning, Singer, who was coming off of *The Usual Suspects* and *Apt Pupil* (which marked the first time he worked with McKellen), made it clear that he was consistently striving to do more than just hit his marks. In fact, it's the reason that producer Lauren Shuler Donner wanted him to take the reins on the original mutant adventure.

"It may not have seemed it, but he was a perfect fit," she offers. "The reason I wanted him was that it was ➤

“BECAUSE OF TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES AND ALL THE MOVIES THAT PRECEDED US, IF WE WERE GOING TO SUCCEED WITH X-MEN, WE WERE GOING TO HAVE TO SUCCEED ON A DIFFERENT LEVEL

LAUREN SHULER DONNER





THREE'S A CROWD

Zak Penn, Simon Kinberg and Brett Ratner recall *X-Men: The Last Stand*

Back in 2006, there was genuine concern over Bryan Singer departing the *X-Men* universe to direct *Superman Returns*, to be replaced by Brett Ratner for third entry *X-Men: The Last Stand*. Zak Penn, who wrote the story for *X2* and co-wrote film three with Simon Kinberg, shared that concern, "in the beginning."

"Bryan Singer is an excellent director," he notes. "But one of the things about Bryan is that he's not a guy whose visual style dominates the stories he's telling. Steven Spielberg, James Cameron, Peter Jackson – they're in the vein of Bryan in that they are all kind of classical filmmakers who focus on story and adapt their style to fit it. What I'm trying to say is that the *X-Men* scripts have a tone as well. If you write to that tone, a director can come in and ruin it or be respectful of it, but it is possible to be maintained."

"X3 TOOK A LOT OF CRAP FROM PEOPLE, BUT IT'S A DARING MOVIE IN A LOT OF WAYS"

For his part, Ratner says he was such a fan of what had been established that he knew the key was to stick with their tone and formula, made easier by the fact that he was dealing with a returning cast. "My input," he says, "was trying to make a more emotional film. I wanted to tell a story and act as if this is the concluding chapter in a trilogy. Not reinvent it; not make it a Brett Ratner film, but stay with the formula that has worked and add more heart. I'm a very emotional guy, I like feeling something in the movie. The audience cares about these characters so much, and it was very important to me to stay true to who they were and not try and reinvent it."

Penn admits that he grew weary over the critical bashing the film ultimately received. "*X3* took a lot of crap from people, but I feel it's a daring movie in a lot of ways," he opines. "I think I was more worried about *X2*, because with that film we just didn't know. You never know when you write something and hand it in. My script was rewritten a lot on *X2*, so I wasn't sure how it was going to turn out. But having seen how *X3* turned out before its release, I kind of knew. I would have been more upset if I saw it and thought it sucked."



➤ obvious from *The Usual Suspects* that he could handle multiple characters, and he had a great style, which this needed. But before I even met him, just looking at his movies, the man had intelligence. I felt, because of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and all the movies that preceded us, that if we were going to succeed, we were going to have to succeed on a different level. One of those levels was intelligence, and he provided that. If it was pure cartoon, we would have died."

Executive producer Avi Arad (represented on screen last summer with *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*) couldn't agree more, noting that the choice of a director like Singer was a very conscious one. "We make art movies wrapped around these giant characters," he explains. "In order to do this, we remember that the most important things in the Marvel universe are human relationships. Even the soul of a villain is a tortured soul. Someone like Bryan, I think understands the complexity of this world, about hidden identities. The mutant is his metaphor for just being different. *The Usual Suspects* was an ensemble piece. It's tough enough to make a movie with two heroes, one villain and a B-story. Here was *X-Men*, where you have 14 people to deal with, and it takes a special mind to play this chess game.

"You could look at *X-Men*, *Spider-Man* or *Daredevil* and say, 'Yeah, if you don't know comics, it's a comic-book movie, which means men in tights jumping over buildings,'" Arad continues. "We wanted to raise the bar. Bryan Singer had the sensitivity, visual style and courage to start the first movie in a concentration camp to explain the villain. Immediately, you know that this villain is multi-faceted. He's not just a guy who decided, 'OK, I'm going to kill humans.' No, he represents something else. You need a filmmaker who can get that philosophy across."

They may have been confident, but today Singer admits that he didn't share their optimism regarding the film's prospects. In fact, he admitted that he was actually "dreading" the release of the first *X-Men* film.

"You have a vision for the *X-Men* universe, but you also respect the fact that it has a huge fan base and there's a lot of scepticism," he reflects. "You also look at your own films and see the shortcomings, and all of a sudden you combine the shortcomings with the scepticism, and it makes one very nervous. But I'm pleased it was successful. My goal, if the first one was successful, was to take the opportunity to make a much more rich motion picture with the sequel."



Part of *X-Men's* success was down to its ability to attract actors of the calibre of Patrick Stewart.

"BRYAN SINGER HAD THE SENSITIVITY, VISUAL STYLE AND COURAGE TO START THE FIRST MOVIE IN A CONCENTRATION CAMP TO EXPLAIN THE VILLAIN"

AVI ARAD

WHICH IS WHAT HE DID WITH X2 AND ITS SETTING SEVERAL WEEKS AFTER THE ORIGINAL. IN THE AFTERMATH OF MAGNETO'S EFFORTS TO ALTER THE

genetic nature of humans, a form of war had been declared on mutants. Director of Homeland Security General Stryker (who has ties with Wolverine's past) leads an armed assault on Professor Charles Xavier's mutant academy. Magneto, who has escaped his prison of plastic, reaches out to Xavier in the hope that by pooling their powers they'll be able to turn back the tide of human aggression. Magneto, naturally, has his own agenda, which will lead to further conflict with the X-Men.

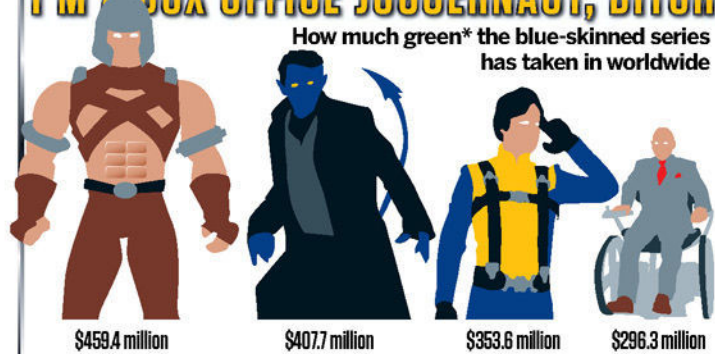
"I wanted X2 to be more rich in character, rich in action, scope, depth, humour and romance," says Singer. "Just to have more things going on; more of the kind of things that I like to see in movies, without having scenes like, 'Rogue is a conductor of human energy. When she touches someone, blah, blah, blah...'. The first movie is the most challenging, because you're defining the characters, you're establishing the universe. It's ultimately what makes the first *Star Wars* movie such a great achievement, but *The*

Empire Strikes Back was a richer movie – a little bit darker, but also a bit more elegant. George Lucas could have gone and told the same story again. In this case, there were certain themes that were the same, but ultimately it was about Luke Skywalker facing his destiny, and our story's about – among other things – Wolverine facing his past. One can only do that when one is fully introduced to the universe and enough people are invested in the characters. I think in the case of our *X-Men* universe, for those who are initiated, there's an investment there. For those who aren't, they'll still know what's going on."

When Singer began developing X2, he had two writers tackle separate potential scripts. One was written by Zak Penn (who would go on to write *X-Men: The Last Stand*) and the other by David Hayter, who had written the first film and would eventually adapt *Watchmen*. In the end, though, the director brought on relative newbies Michael Dougherty and Daniel Harris (who would write *Superman Returns* for Singer in 2006). They joined the crew in February 2002, and found themselves in the unique position of remaining on set through every stage of

I'M A BOX OFFICE JUGGERNAUT, BITCH

How much green* the blue-skinned series has taken in worldwide



*Unadjusted, courtesy of BoxOfficeMojo.com



The expansive X-Men mythos allowed for a colourful cast of characters.

The death of Cyclops was one of the most controversial aspects of X3.



➤ production – which is highly unusual on films.

“I think part of that is because sometimes the directors and producers don’t want the writers around, and sometimes the writers don’t want to be around,” says Dougherty. “We were really there. In a lot of ways it’s not like it was required by contract. We wanted to be there to make sure the story stayed intact; that the screenplay didn’t wander off in 20 different directions, which tends to happen when you’re making one of these films. For us, we just wanted to make sure that the baby would grow up well. For Bryan, he likes having people he trusts creatively around him, just to whisper in his ear now and then, and because he likes to make changes while he’s shooting. To me it’s like time travel; you make one tiny change now, it’s going to affect everything you shot before or are about to shoot. It’s a massive ripple effect. He wanted his writers there to manage that ripple effect and make sure we weren’t going to shoot ourselves in the foot down the road.”

“The flip side,” Harris adds with a laugh, “is that it was a lot of hard work, but we were there from call to wrap every day for 115 days of shooting. They allowed us to be involved with every scene and see everything play out and every word come to life. The flip side of that is when scenes don’t work or something isn’t funny, they pause the scene, turn to us and say, ‘Find us something better right now.’”

WHICH IS ACTUALLY SOMETHING THEY WERE CHARGED WITH DOING RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT WITH THE FILM. THEIR

directive was that Singer wanted to expand on certain elements from the first film, particularly the growing tensions between mutants and humans and the fact that

there were two mutant groups reacting to that tension. On one side was Magneto, and on the other was Xavier, along with their respective followers.

“Bryan really wanted to up the stakes and create a story where humans in essence were going to be making the next move,” says Dougherty. “Whereas the first film was two mutant groups fighting among themselves and humans were what was at stake, this is kind of the human strike back, in a sense. He really wanted to create a story that would give a face to the humans. We had Senator Kelly in the first film, who is the ultimate politician that smiles, waves and shakes hands. He wasn’t really a man of action. Bryan wanted to create a human villain, in essence, that kind of represented the extreme position that some people might take. So we created the character of William Stryker. His name comes from the ‘God Loves, Man Kills’ book, but that’s pretty much all he has in common with that character. In the comic, he was a religious figure; a Bible-thumping type character who hatches his own plot against mutants. Bryan wanted to create a character that came from the shadowy government realm. In X2, he has a much more military background.”

The idea, Harris points out, is that the heroes of the film exist in the real world that has been created for them. While it may not necessarily be the world that the audience lives in, it’s taken very seriously within the bounds of the movie.

“It was important to us to treat the escalating war and humanity turning against mutant kind in a very real way and to give it a very human face,” he says. “The flip side of that is to make this an action/adventure comic-book hero movie that could work within the human framework appropriately. To put this in real terms, there was no kind of mutant villain in the movie.



1 X-MEN (2000)

Professor X, Cyclops, Jean Grey, Storm and Wolverine. **Not including:** Rogue, as she didn’t actually get the opportunity to go into battle with the team – she got kidnapped by Magneto and used as bait instead.

2 X2: X-MEN UNITED (2003)

Professor X, Cyclops, Jean Grey, Storm, Wolverine, Rogue, Nightcrawler, Iceman and Pyro. **Not including:** Colossus, because Logan put him on the subs bench.

3 X-MEN: THE LAST STAND

Professor X, Beast, Storm, Rogue, Wolverine, Iceman, Colossus, Angel and Kitty Pryde. **Not including:** Cyclops, he was hardly in it. Jean and Pyro; they were on the wrong side.

4 X-MEN: FIRST CLASS (2011)

Professor X, Magneto, Havok, Beast, Banshee and Mystique. **Not including:** Darwin, as he didn’t even get a chance, and Angel Salvatore, because she ducked out as soon as she could.

5 X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST (2014)

Professor X, Magneto, Wolverine, Iceman, Kitty Pryde, Storm, Colossus, Sunspot, Bishop, Warpath, Blink and Rogue. **Not including:** The characters in the Seventies.



The films exhibited an outsider quality that was easy to identify with.



With quality staying variable, not all the characters got the portrayal they deserved.



Part movie part allegory, *X-Men* had something for everyone.

It was a question for us of mutants fighting humans, and it's a very difficult thing to work with because you have people with every conceivable power. Covering all of our characters, they can do anything one way or the other, and working together they can do everything. Magneto's role in earlier drafts was a friend of the cause. There was no arch-enemy who was a mutant with any kind of powers, which did not enable us to have any kind of good, big action at the end that made sense within our story. So what we did was try to re-conceive the anti-heroes and villains of the movie to match our people better and make more organic sense – a worthy battle, but also on a story level that was more interesting, so you were dealing with psychology between the creation of mutants and mutants fighting for humans, and what you get out of mutants fighting on the wrong side of the fence.

"Who's on what side," he elaborates, "having to choose those sides, and Magneto's role in the whole movie was greatly changed by us. Let's just say that before we were around, Magneto was sort of a friend to the cause, and that just seemed to go against his nature. But now not everything is as it seems, and it's important

"BRYAN SINGER IS JEWISH AND THERE'S A CERTAIN UNDERSTANDING OF FEELING MARGINAL WHICH IS REALLY WHAT THE MUTANT THING IS ALL ABOUT FOR HIM"

BRIAN COX



for this movie that you go along with these guys and believe what you have to believe at the moment. Sometimes, characters need to be more complex than they appear. It was our job to take full advantage of these amazing characters. You can't just disobey them and go against their inherent needs."

One of the most appealing aspects of *X2* for Dougherty was the fact that the story served as an allegory of real-life issues, which is something he feels the audience doesn't usually find in the sub-genre. "I think we've all felt at some point in our lives that we were outsiders or freaks," he says. "We all felt like outsiders, and this is the film that capitalises on all that. One of the things I said about the X-Men in general is, 'What are they whining about? They all look like supermodels.' But then you have a character like Nightcrawler, and even among the outsiders he's an outsider. Everyone else is gorgeous and can walk down the street and not get noticed. This guy has blue skin, a tail and yellow eyes. What makes it fun is that they accept him. He's different, but to these characters he's not."

Given its 2003 release date, much of the power of *X2* comes from the fact that there are numerous elements of the story that can

be looked upon as a mutant reflection of our own world, with Stryker's call for war not seeming very far removed from America's response to 9/11 in Afghanistan and Iraq; and of course, the persecution of those who are different.

"It is a reflection, though it was never quite the intention," offers Singer. "The script was developed and the story pretty much laid out prior to 9/11, for instance, but at the same time there's timeless conflicts that are occurring as a society within our population that exists – some members good, some members sinister. A great paranoia has developed in relation to this society, and what's going to happen to the world is the result. A change is coming. It's that kind of thing. I had that story before the tragedy, and one doesn't alter anything due to that. I think a lot of events in history are nothing new. In this case, it just happened to be significant."



The *X-Men And The Wolverine Adamantium Collection*, containing four *X-Men* movies and both *Wolverine* movies, is available now on DVD and Blu-ray.

THE PICTURE THAT TRULY GAVE BIRTH TO THE COMIC-BOOK MOVIE PHENOMENON, SPIDER-MAN FOREVER CHANGED OUR EXPECTATIONS OF SUPERHERO FILMS THROUGH DIRECTOR SAM RAIMI'S IDIOSYNCRATIC INTERPRETATION OF PETER PARKER'S LIFE. TEN YEARS ON, SPIDER-MAN WAS REBOOTED FOR THE BIG-SCREEN. HERE'S WHY 2002'S HEARTFELT LOVE LETTER TO THE CHARACTER IS STILL THE DEFINITIVE LIVE-ACTION WEBSLINGER...

SPIDER-MAN



Film

RUNNING TIME: 121 mins
RELEASE DATE:
3 May 2002
DIRECTOR: Sam Raimi
WRITER: David Koepp
CAST: Tobey Maguire,
Kirsten Dunst, Willem
Dafoe, James Franco,
Cliff Robertson, Rosemary
Harris, JK Simmons

About

Student Peter Parker is just an ordinary teenager, living with his Aunt May and Uncle Ben until he's bitten by a radioactive spider. Soon, he finds himself mutating, gaining the powers of a spider, such as climbing walls and firing webs. After an incident that Peter could have prevented ends with his uncle's death, Peter becomes the superhero Spider-Man, and must prevent the Green Goblin – secretly his best friend's father, Norman Osborn – from attacking New York and murdering his childhood sweetheart, Mary Jane Watson.

The best movies have the power to define your youth. We've previously cited *Star Wars* as an example in this regard due to its cross-generational appeal and multiple releases over the years, but different films achieve this connection with their audiences due to two main factors: timing and relevance. For young people growing up during the last decade, the *Spider-Man* series was absolutely huge – a pop culture juggernaut that even overshadowed the inconsistent *Star Wars* prequels. Sam Raimi brought Peter Parker's world to life with a sense of heart, humour and even a touch of an independent filmmaker's spirit that lay the foundations for credible directors to tackle other superhero comics with the same philosophy.

Spider-Man had already been on a long journey to the big screen before Raimi got involved. The rights transferred through several different studios during the Seventies and Eighties, with James Cameron at one point attached, but finally landed at Columbia Pictures in 1999. The film itself went into production just as Marvel was preparing to have a creative renaissance under Avi Arad, who would also produce the film. When the studio was considering directors, Raimi wasn't the first choice, but he impressed executives with his passion for the source material, and landed the job.

"Spider-Man had real personality and real problems," Raimi said in a featurette interview on the DVD. "The character of Peter Parker was a real kid in high school, and the Spider-Man comic-books were more about how these superpowers affected his real life, so I could really relate to those stories in the early comic-books in the Sixties

and Seventies, and he became one of my favourites."

Interestingly, Raimi had previously collaborated with Stan Lee on a theatrical version of *Thor* that ultimately failed to materialise, and he wasn't previously a studio hit-making director, with his last big movie, *For Love Of The Game* starring Kevin Costner, bombing at the box office. To us, of course, we knew him as the director of the *Evil Dead* trilogy – the definition of a cult director. He was intimidated by the comparatively huge task at hand. "I was absolutely terrified," Raimi told T-Online back in 2002. "I got a call telling me I'd be directing the film, and I had no idea how I was ever going to do that... the script was in not great shape, and I had no idea how I was going to bring off what I thought all the fans were going to be expecting." Raimi found an approach to the story that he

screen test won him the role of the awkward teenager-turned superhero. After a revolving door of actors were reported as being part of the movie at some point or another, including John Malkovich, the role of Norman Osborn went to Willem Dafoe, while James Franco played his son and Peter's best friend, Harry. Kirsten Dunst was one of the last to be cast, winning the part of Peter's childhood love, Mary Jane Watson.

Jurassic Park and *Carlito's Way* writer David Koepp was hired as a screenwriter after going through an extensive pitching process. "I had loved Spider-Man when I was a kid, and it was clearly great material for a movie," Koepp told *Writer's Digest* in 2008. "I did as much prep work as I could, and I found all the relevant sections of the various comics that I was interested in. I put it all up on big poster boards, and went in there and pitched my ass off."

"I DECIDED TO MAKE IT AS REAL AS POSSIBLE SO THE AUDIENCE COULD BELIEVE IN THIS HERO" SAM RAIMI

believed would be dramatically successful, though. "Sometimes in comic-book movies, they take a step back from reality, even when dealing with the characters, but I decided to take a different approach, and make it as real as possible so the audience could believe in this hero. That was my guide through all the performance pieces."

Casting the right Peter Parker wasn't completely straightforward. While executives were initially unconvinced by Sam Raimi's choice of *Pleasantville* star Tobey Maguire for the role of Spider-Man, an impressive

Although not the first superhero movie of the modern age – that distinction goes to Bryan Singer's slow-burning *X-Men* picture in 2000 – *Spider-Man* illustrated how relevant Marvel's brand of flawed superhero was to the massive audience beyond its insular TV and comic-book outlets, with the film generating enormous hype while it was in production. Spider-Man was the type of superhero that could only be done justice in the CGI age, as illustrated by the earlier 1977 live-action TV show. Achieving the look of Spider-Man, that much-desired appearance of Spidey swinging through ➤

THE BEST MOMENTS OF SPIDER-MAN

We almost included the upside down kiss, but we're just not that romantic

THE HUMAN SPIDER



Peter signs up for a \$3,000 wrestling match, only to find himself fighting the enormous Bonesaw (played by 'Macho Man' Randy Savage), and gently mocking the wrestler before trashing him in the ring. It's the film's first terrific action sequence.

T BRUCE CAMPBELL CAMEOS AS THE WRESTLING REFEREE, AND GIVES SPIDER-MAN HIS NAME.

THE DEATH OF UNCLE BEN



Peter learns the ultimate lesson in power and responsibility when his uncle is killed by the same robber that he allowed to get away just moments earlier. This is the psychological making of Spider-Man as a hero, and it couldn't have been better executed.

T MARTIN SHEEN WILL TAKE ON THE LATE, GREAT CLIFF ROBERTSON'S ROLE IN *THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN*.

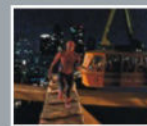
TIMES SQUARE PARADE



All-round orgasmic tribute to capitalism Times Square is the ideal locale for a set-piece, and here Raimi maximises its potential by having Willem Dafoe's cackling Green Goblin bomb the shit out of the parade, before Spidey swoops in and saves the day.

T BUFFY ACTRESS ELIZA DUSHKU REPORTEDLY AUDITIONED FOR THE ROLE OF MARY JANE WATSON.

THE BRIDGE BATTLE



The Green Goblin attempts to force Spider-Man to decide whether to save Mary Jane or a cable car full of small children – who would you save? Both, of course. This scene is at its most fun when locals start lobbing stuff at Osborn – you don't mess with New Yorkers.

T THE ANGLE AND PREMISE OF THIS SEQUENCE RECALLS THE CLASSIC SPIDEY STORY *THE NIGHT GWEN STACY DIED*.

OSBORN'S BODY



After his death, Spider-Man returns Norman Osborn's body to Harry, only for his son to spot Peter and put two and two together and come up with five: that the web-slinger is a friendly neighbourhood murderer, setting up Harry Osborn's downward spiral that would continue over the next instalments.

T WILLEM DAFOE BRIEFLY REAPPEARS IN *SPIDER-MAN 2* AS PART OF HARRY'S HALLUCINATION.



In the Green Goblin, the film had a genuinely menacing villain.



“YOU SEE TALENTED PEOPLE WHO PUT THEIR OWN TAKE ON YOUR CHARACTERS, AND THEY MAKE THEM EVEN BETTER THAN EVER; THEY BRING THEM TO LIFE” STAN LEE



the skyscraper-formed tunnels required a combination of live-action stuntwork and CGI, aided by contributions from *Star Wars*' John Dykstra, who Raimi worked with in order to be faithful to the look of the comic.

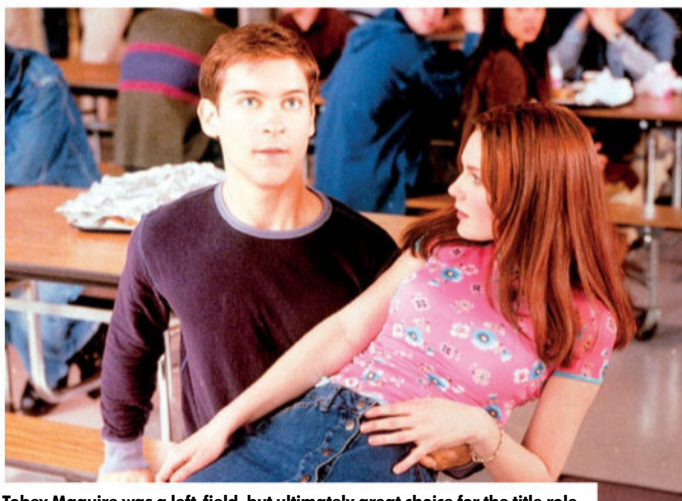
The movie's dedication to the origin story was noted by fans, even if some of the specifics weren't quite there (the organic web-shooters being one example that

pedants jumped on). Nonetheless, Raimi found fertile storytelling material in Peter Parker's jumbled personal life, finding realism in grounding him as a positive-minded geek, struggling for money and being bullied by Flash Thompson. He's in love with Mary Jane Watson, and while on a school trip, ends up being bitten by a radioactive spider, augmenting his DNA; it's all there in Stan Lee and Steve Ditko's *Amazing Fantasy* issue 15, along with some awkward teenage metaphors. When Parker's own ignorance of responsibility inadvertently ends with his Uncle Ben's death, Peter understands how he must use his newfound abilities, becoming the superhero known as Spider-Man.

Raimi's real genius in *Spider-Man* was also in reading between the lines, though, in creative embellishment beyond that which is on the page of the 1962 origin and the subsequent issues by Lee and Ditko. Much like Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Bagley did with 1999's comic-book reboot *Ultimate Spider-Man*, Raimi re-imagined and expanded the character's origin for a modern audience (though a live-action portrayal of that origin was presumably

a more strenuous undertaking). Tobey Maguire is just that little bit unconventional a choice of actor, bringing a kind of energy and optimism to Peter Parker, while Aunt May (Rosemary Harris) and Uncle Ben (Cliff Robertson) are believable elderly guardians; even Norman Osborn's desperate businessman feels elevated beyond his original conceit. It was contemporary, fresh and at times inspiring – Peter Parker lives in a world of realistic characters, as Raimi intended, yet the way the film is shot and cut together is very much in the four-colour vein. *Spider-Man* serves multiple purposes, which is a key reason why it managed to please so many audiences at the time.

Spider-Man balances its roots as a comic-book and its status as a film perfectly. It's over an hour into the film that we first see Peter Parker in full costume, and the majority of the first two acts are devoted to characterisation – seeing how Peter is a social outcast, Harry's difficult relationship with his father, MJ's torrid home life and Norman Osborn's inability to retain control of the company he created. Basic emotional beats they may be, yet they form a gripping



Tobey Maguire was a left-field, but ultimately great choice for the title role.

Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* is out now on DVD and Blu-ray.

dramatic arc and justify the spectacle, which so many cash-eating blockbuster movies fail to do on any level – the likes of *Transformers* and *Battleship* being especially cynical exponents of that.

There are signs of age now, of course: the seemingly toddler-esque James Franco, some slightly dodgy animation in the CGI bits and the appearance of Macy Gray add something of a time stamp to *Spider-Man*, but our gripes are pretty minor. Here, we can see the template for almost every superhero origin movie that followed; with the exception of Nolan's loosely structured *Batman Begins*, none of them start with the hero in the midst of his powers. Everything starts with just a person, explaining their motivations and building them up, a then-risky approach that did not exist before Raimi's *Spider-Man*. In the days of Richard Donner's *Superman* and Tim Burton's *Batman*, the superheroes were already in spandex during the first act. Raimi convinced us to learn the characters before the action kicks off, and almost every Marvel picture under the *Avengers*' tent has borrowed that approach. It made us reflect on these situations, and the wonderful cast – outstanding in Maguire's case – made us care as we absorbed that drama.

"I've always been touched by Peter Parker in a way that I've never been able to describe on film, even though I've got a great actor performing it." Raimi told the *LA Times*. The *Evil Dead* director made two more *Spider-Man* films before plans for a

fourth collapsed, but his enthusiasm didn't wane. Joining the ranks of a select few creators in comic-book history, *Spider-Man* ensured that Raimi left a mark on the Marvel icon that would shape people's perception of the hero for decades. "You see talented people who put their own take on your characters," co-creator Stan Lee said in an interview for HBO's making of the film documentary. "And they make them even better than ever; they bring them to life."

The Amazing Spider-Man arguably came too soon. For many *Spider-Man* fans, the definitive on-screen friendly neighbourhood superhero already exists in the form of Tobey Maguire, since this iteration of the character is so well-realised on every front. Andrew Garfield did justice to the role of Peter Parker, and Emma Stone's Gwen Stacy was refreshing. It's just a shame what he was given just wasn't as good. What happens next only time will tell with Sony and Marvel partnering to bring Spidey into the MCU world, and a change in 'artistic' direction, it might not even be Peter we see. 🕸



SPIDER-MAN 4: WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN

It's a shame *Spider-Man 4* fell apart. After *Spider-Man 3*'s messy concoction of so-called 'emo' anti-heroics and a wrestling ring's worth of villains, in a slightly better world Raimi would have regained control for a final instalment and found the emotional grounding of the character once more. A behind-the-scenes disagreement led to Raimi departing the project, however, and *Spider-Man 3* remains a bad way to say goodbye to this iteration of the character. Numerous villains, including the Lizard and the Vulture, were rumoured, but with no settled script, the project collapsed, and *The Amazing Spider-Man* was announced within days. The fear was that a new Peter Parker, played by Andrew Garfield, would face a struggle in convincing audiences that the story offers something genuinely new, but against all odds it managed exactly that.

WHY IS SPIDER-MAN A MODERN CLASSIC?

PETER PARKER AS YOU KNOW HIM

Spider-Man is faithful to the comics – Peter is a loveable loser who struggles with girls, learns about responsibility and doesn't get the credit he deserves. He's flawed in a very Marvel-ish way.

PETER PARKER, AS YOU DON'T KNOW HIM

Spider-Man is faithful to the comics, but doesn't mimic them. That's the key to the film's success – Peter's life is examined with a kind of depth that belongs to this movie, embodied perfectly by Tobey Maguire, who brings something just a little more quirky and substantial to the hero.

POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY

The themes of *Spider-Man* ground the character with a true *raison d'être* – everything Peter does comes from this, while other superhero movies focus on destiny and the idea of becoming great.

WEB-SLINGING

That feeling of verticality and motion during the action sequences was always the struggle *Spider-Man* would face, and its then-revolutionary effects, coupled to rollercoaster-like cinematography, captured the most exciting feature of the comic.

J JONAH JAMESON

Possibly even more suited to his role than Maguire, JK Simmons was born to be J Jonah Jameson, turning his rage (trust us, it's an accurate depiction of an editor in the midst of deadline stress) into the funniest parts of the movie, adding humour to every bit of aggression spat at his employees.



The man behind Hellboy

In 2004 Hellboy became the first Dark Horse hero to go big on the silver screen since *The Mask*. We found out from creator Mike Mignola how *Big Red* came into being...



What first got you excited about comics?

My cousin was a comic-book reader, and he introduced me to great old Marvel comics – stuff by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. The bug hit me that there was this whole world, a whole mythology, I was unaware of.

What inspired you to go from being a fan to working in the industry?

From an early age, fuelled by comics and the books I was reading, I loved the supernatural. As I went through art school, my goal was to make a living drawing monsters, but there aren't many jobs doing that! Gearing myself towards becoming an illustrator, I started looking at comics again as a place where I could get away with drawing monsters. I didn't think I was good enough to draw comics, but thought that by getting in there, inking other people's work, I'd eventually get a job drawing covers or something. It never occurred to me to write my own stories at that point.

What exactly prompted you to start scripting then?

After ten years in the business, drawing a lot of stuff that didn't have monsters in it, I realised the only way I was going to get to draw the stuff I wanted to draw was to make it up myself. I co-wrote a Batman story – basically: here's a list of the things I wanna draw – and it was fun. I then thought that instead of making up weird stories and sticking established characters into them, why not make up my own characters, specifically for these kinds of supernatural stories?

And this is when Hellboy was born?

Yeah. I knew the stories and subject matter I wanted to do, and so it was just a matter of making up a character to base stories around. Hellboy isn't a character I'd planned to do; I just wanted a cult

detective character. I'd have made him a regular human being, except I knew I'd get bored drawing that, and so I thought of making a fun monster my main character.

Hellboy stories contain mythology, horror and fantasy elements. Where does your inspiration for these things come from?

Well, the first few *Hellboy* books are an explosion – everything and the kitchen sink is thrown in there, because who knew how long I was going to get a chance to do this? So they include everything I ever wanted to draw: pulp magazine horror stories, B-movies, Victorian-era ghost stories... Basically, everything I'd ever seen was the inspiration for the first *Hellboy*!

Later, I gravitated towards folklore – something I've loved since I was a kid. In fact, I'd originally planned on doing straight adaptations of folklore tales, but I realised once I'd done *Hellboy*, and that people liked it, I could do the same stories, but use Hellboy as a device to get people to read them. Straight adaptations of folklore tales would narrow the audience tremendously, but Hellboy, despite being beast of the apocalypse, has an 'everyman' appeal that readers can relate to.

What appeals to you about folklore?

I love the element of the absurd. Stuff happens where you go: "Wow! There's no way I'd have made that up!" You don't know why something works or happens, but the beauty is that it just does. For some reason, someone made up a story where Russian witch Baba Yaga sneaks into a guy's house each night to count his silverware. God knows why! But there's some other logic going on, which I refer to as 'fairy tale logic' – a kind of strangeness I find endlessly fascinating.

One of the most important things in supernatural fiction is having an element where we don't understand why things are happening, because once we do, they become science fiction.

And, ironically, you use a demon, Hellboy, to keep the things grounded!

There's a schizophrenic nature to writing *Hellboy*. I listen to a lot of Shakespeare and Bible films, and I have a tendency to write dialogue in that kind of rhythm, especially when dealing with bad guys. After writing a couple of pages of that, I become embarrassed by what I'm doing. Hellboy is the part of me that's my father's son – he'll say, "What the hell are you doing?" and let the reader know that I know the other thing is kind of silly. It's a formula that's worked well. *Hellboy* has my sensibilities, some of my sense of humour, but also my father's real blue-collar working stiff attitude about things.

How did it feel to work on both script and art during Hellboy's early days, thereby having almost total control over your creation?

It's interesting, because initially I never wanted to write this stuff. I enjoyed coming up with stories, but liked the safety net of having a writer who'd put the words in there. John Byrne co-wrote the first *Hellboy* ➤



Mignola is among the most respected comic authors working today.



The *Hellboy* cartoon has widened the appeal.



There's an impressive consistency in tone across the media.



The movie was a very good companion piece to the comic.



story, and my original plan was to give him a 'laundry list' of things I wanted to draw and have him knock it into shape. But by that point, I was making things up fast and, little-by-little, piecing the story together. I soon found there were things John changed that sounded more polished and professional, but they lacked the oddness and quirkiness of what I wrote, and some of the humour didn't translate. John knew this, but all along he'd been saying I should be writing everything anyway; he never tried to make *Hellboy* his book, and he treated himself like bicycle training wheels! I can't thank him enough for that, and at the end of the series, he told me I was on my own!

The scariest moment was when I took over the next one, writing and drawing everything – it was in black and white, so I didn't even have a colourist. But once I relaxed, I found there were so many things I could do as writer and artist.

The *Hellboy* comic is quite cinematic. Was the potential for a movie always at the back of your mind?

It never occurred to me, because I never thought I'd get to do a second *Hellboy* story! I thought I'll do this one, and when no one buys it, I'll limp back to whatever job I can get from Marvel or DC, but I'd at least be able to look back and say I once got to put my personality on the page. When Dark Horse said it was interested in developing a *Hellboy* film, I went: "Sure, I'm happy to take the movie option money, as long as you guys want to keep optioning it, but no one will ever

Mignola's style has rightly won acclaim from all quarters. Frankly, it's stunning.

ESSENTIAL HELLBOY

With many different goodies to choose from, we direct you to the key instalments in the *Hellboy* universe...



Hellboy: Seed Of Destruction

Where it all began, in more ways than one, this trade compiles Hellboy's 'origins' story, and the very first Hellboy stories produced.



Hellboy: The Right Hand Of Doom

The fourth *Hellboy* collection includes a number of shorter stories, including classic folklore adaptation 'Heads'.



B.P.R.D.: Hollow Earth And Other Stories

Spin-off series *B.P.R.D.* concentrates on the other members in Hellboy's team, and is just as compelling as *Hellboy*.



Hellboy Animated: Blood And Iron

The best of the two animated features, *Blood And Iron* has set pieces that would make movie directors drool uncontrollably.



Hellboy: Director's Cut

The director's cut of the movie fleshes out the big-screen intro to Hellboy's world, along with providing hours of engrossing extras.



Mignola didn't have complete control over the film.

“Guillermo del Toro was the one who wanted the Hellboy film to be faithful to the comic”

make a film of this.” When I met del Toro, I realised if anybody was going to make a *Hellboy* film, he was the guy to do it, but it was always such an uphill battle that I never thought it was gonna happen.

Was it hard seeing *Hellboy* changed for the big screen?

I'm not someone who says something needs to be like the source material. In fact, during my first meeting with del Toro, I told him: “I'd love for the film to be true to the spirit of the character, but you turn it into whatever you want to.” I actually had an idea for an easier *Hellboy* movie; del Toro was the one who wanted the film to be faithful to the comic!

But there are fairly big changes from the comic...

Yeah, del Toro thought the love interest was necessary, and there were scenes he'd wanted to do for years, which *Hellboy* became a vehicle for. But that's great! I wanted a filmmaker with his own agenda, because then you get an interesting film. And the process was good; we mostly saw eye-to-eye. But the five per cent where we didn't was hard, because it was his film, and he had the final say on certain things. To survive that, I had to remember the comic's the comic, the film's the film, and that I was working with a guy I really liked on *his* movie, not working on my movie. It's a similar experience with the sequel, but increasingly the film is del Toro's, especially as the story veers further from the comic.

Why is the sequel's direction towards the folklore side of the comics?

That was a conscious decision we both made, because that element was missing from the first film, which instead had the Lovecraft-meets-pulp-magazine-mad-scientist stuff. If you look at the two films together, you see the range of *Hellboy*.

How hard a pitch was *Hellboy 2*?

It was easier when *Pan's Labyrinth* came out, which I'd not seen when we made up the story. Because we were pitching a story where Hellboy fights fairies and elves, we knew we'd have to jump in at some point and say: “But it's not what you think! It's going to be dark and scary!” After *Pan's Labyrinth*, this was easier for studios to understand. People usually think of cute fairies in a garden, but in *Hellboy* you'll see a nasty kind of fairy, and that's not what an audience is used to.

What prompted the *Hellboy* animated features?

del Toro talked about an animation, and Revolution Studios set it up. I wasn't the driving force behind it, but when I heard they wanted to do animation, I recommended *Hellboy* fan Ted Stone, who'd been at Disney and had recently become available. For an animation to happen, someone needed to be involved who understood the comic, because clearly del Toro wasn't going to have time to devote to it, and I'm not an animator. We needed someone who knew animation and who knew *Hellboy*.

Are you happy with the visual style, since it's very different to your own?

I think the fans feel otherwise, but I was very happy the studio didn't want to use my style. When things are in my

style, I sit there going: “Oh, they don't understand it, they're not doing it right.” I just see the mistakes. And the style is another thing that distances it from the comics, making the animation an alternate version of *Hellboy*. It remains faithful, though, and the animation is closer to the stories I did than the movies.

Is it difficult to no longer be totally in control of *Hellboy*?

On one hand, it's great, because I'm exposing *Hellboy* to a much wider audience, and more people will discover the comic. The flip side is that most will never see what I do, but at least I got something out to the world! And as someone who erases ten lines for every one he draws, not drawing for a while was actually a kind of relief. But you start to miss getting your hands into everything, and there's a danger of spending so much time overseeing different things that you can't focus on any one thing.

What is the future for *Hellboy*?

Hellboy has a future. I've plotted it to the end of the series – or what could be the end – so my goal is to get to do the whole story. Hopefully, I can get Duncan Fegredo [*Hellboy*'s new main artist] to stick around to the bitter end! I'm really happy with the collaboration, and I just want to finish the story!

That'd be great to see; few long-running series have a coherent beginning, middle and end. That's one of the problems of mainstream comics: they have the illusion of change, but they're properties of giant companies. They'll never let you keep Superman dead! But because I control *Hellboy* – at least the comic-book version – I can make definite changes with the character, and they're happening right now. It's very strange: after ten years fumbling around in the *Hellboy* world, it's now set on a certain course, and I'm turning corners where there's no going back, which is exciting, but daunting.

The weird thing will be if del Toro gets to do a third *Hellboy* film, which would probably be the end of that cycle. He'd be doing the end of *Hellboy* a decade before I get to. One thing I've got to be careful of is that I don't tell del Toro how I plan to end the comic, because I sure as hell don't want him to put it on film first! ☞



Hellboy Director's Cut is out now on DVD and Blu-ray, while both *Hellboy* animated movies are available as one DVD set.

INFORMATION BITES

Mike Mignola

// Born in the Sixties, in sunny California, Mike Mignola began his comics career due to wanting to “draw monsters for a living”.

// Mike's early work largely included inking, and he worked on Marvel Comics' *Daredevil*, *Rocket Raccoon* and *Alpha Flight*.

// Mike's first breakthrough in the industry was arguably his work on *Batman*, which included covers, pencilling work and scripting.

// *Gotham By Gaslight*, to which Mike contributed, sees an 1880s Batman battling Jack The Ripper, and is now considered the first *Elseworlds* story.

// *Hellboy* first appeared in 1994, published by Dark Horse, drawing on Mike's many and varied interests.

// One-shot *ZombieWorld* was initially made up by Mike “as a joke on the phone” when talking to his editor.

// Many *Hellboy* trade paperbacks include additional or edited pages, discussions of content by the author, and other such extras.

// Although previously illustrating the bulk of *Hellboy*, Mike passed primary art duties to Duncan Fegredo in 2007.

// When *Hellboy* movie rights were optioned, Mike created a new character, in case the film was horrendous.

// Along with working on the *Hellboy* movie, Mike also worked on *Blade II* and *Bram Stoker's Dracula*.

THE BATMAN FILM FRANCHISE WAS PUT THROUGH THE WRINGER IN THE LATE NINETIES, AND URGENTLY NEEDED A REPRIEVE. WITH AN ALL-STAR CAST, RISING TALENT CHRISTOPHER NOLAN GAVE US A MODERN CAPED CRUSADER...

BATMAN BEGINS

Film

RUNNING TIME: 139 mins

RELEASE DATE:

15 June 2005

DIRECTOR:

Christopher Nolan

WRITER: David S Goyer

CAST: Christian Bale,

Michael Caine, Liam

Neeson, Gary Oldman,

Katie Holmes

About

After his parents were murdered in front of him as a child, an adult Bruce Wayne is on the hunt for vengeance. Soon, brawling with petty criminals far away from his native Gotham City, Wayne is sought out by one Henri Ducard, who represents the shadowy Ra's Al Ghul and the League Of Shadows, and later teach Wayne the art of fighting and acrobatics. After a conflict with the League, Wayne returns to his decaying family home and assumes the mantle of the Batman, who must face his former mentor as well as the psychotic Scarecrow to stop the city from being brought to its knees.

The greatest aspect of any superhero movie isn't how closely the director manages to mimic the source material – it's how they apply their methodology and creative reasoning to the characters on the page. After years of the *Batman* franchise being trapped in development hell following the flamboyant flop that was *Batman & Robin*, Warner needed its new adaptation of the tortured DC Comics superhero to be the right one. With the success of Columbia's *Spider-Man* film in 2002, the studio was aware that it needed to get its heroes, once the dominant force of comic-book movies on the big screen, back in the big leagues. Audiences felt like they were owed a better class of superhero movie; the studios wanted the franchise to be as profitable as it was in the Tim Burton-era; critics had rightfully kicked *Batman & Robin* to the ground. It was much more than an ordinary directing job.

Director Christopher Nolan's reputation had soared with the backwards-told revenge thriller *Memento* and Al Pacino-starring hit *Insomnia*. The question of what to do next soon answered itself. "When I was looking for what to do next, one of the things I heard about was that Warner Bros were looking to restart *Batman*," Nolan told *The Guardian* in 2005. "After the success of *Spider-Man*, they felt they ought to get their big guys off the bench. The great part was that they wanted to refresh and invigorate the franchise, but didn't have

any specific concepts, and were essentially looking for someone to come in and tell them what to do. It's pretty unusual to have this sort of movie up for grabs."

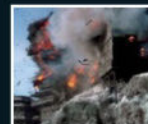
Nolan, a fan of the Caped Crusader since his youth, joined the project in early 2003 and put together the script with the help of *Blade: Trinity* director David S Goyer. While not following the story of any one comic-book from the Dark Knight's extensive back catalogue, it extracted disparate elements of the *Batman* mythology and wove them together. There was some of the origin story from *Batman: Year One*, the Falcone crime syndicate from *The Long Halloween*, and the early travelling years of the superhero as told by the short story *The Man Who Falls*. Ra's Al Ghul, *Batman Begins'* primary antagonist, came from the legendary Denny O'Neil/Neal Adams run in the Seventies.

The director based the casting of *Batman Begins* on that of Richard Donner's *Superman*, with the idea of courting high quality talent for even small roles in the movie. The resulting cast featured the likes of Michael Caine and Morgan Freeman in key supporting roles, as butler Alfred Pennyworth and Wayne Enterprises CEO Lucius Fox respectively. Katie Holmes brought little to the movie – save, perhaps, for extra hype due to her off-screen relationship with Tom Cruise – but Liam Neeson, once again playing a mentor in Henri Ducard (or so it seemed), brought an intimidating quality as a primary antagonist. Cillian Murphy, meanwhile, embodied a creepy and manipulative Scarecrow with a simple sackcloth mask

SECRET ORIGIN

The five finest scenes from *Batman Begins*

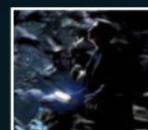
RA'S AL GHUL ESCAPE



Refusing to kill a man and accept his mentor's definition of justice, Bruce Wayne escapes from the mountain base of Ra's Al Ghul, destroying it and defeating the League Of Shadows in the process. Wayne protects his mentor, Henri Ducard, by risking his life to save him in this explosive action scene that outlines the complicated moral compass of the Batman.

T *BATMAN* (1989) SCREENWRITER SAM HAMM ACTUALLY CREATED HENRI DUCARD DURING A GUEST STINT ON DETECTIVE COMICS.

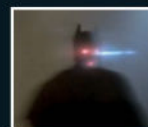
BIRTH OF THE BATMAN



We witness the true origin of the Batman as Bruce Wayne learns to conquer his childhood fear and use it to battle his enemies. Wayne returns to the cave where, as a child, he was tormented by bats. This time, he's able to walk through their paths of flight, unafraid, ready to become something more than a man in his battle for justice.

T *BATMAN BEGINS* WAS THE FIRST DC MOVIE TO USE THE NEW DC COMICS LOGO.

FEAR TOXIN



The prisoners on Arkham Island are poisoned by the Scarecrow's fear toxin, leading to elaborate hallucinations that show a horse breathing fire and the Batman depicted as a terrifying creature. This tapped into the Scarecrow's true horror and grotesquery within the comics, while also dovetailing with the theme of fear faced within the story.

T CILLIAN MURPHY AUDITIONED TO PLAY BRUCE WAYNE, BUT WAS CAST AS THE SCARECROW ON THE STRENGTH OF HIS PERFORMANCE.

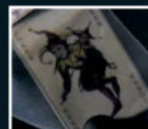
"BUT I DON'T HAVE TO SAVE YOU."



Confronted by his mentor in Gotham, Batman scraps with the now-revealed Ra's Al Ghul on a train. Jim Gordon blows the tracks, and Batman escapes, leaving a defeated Ra's to die – operating per his moral compass, Batman isn't killing Ra's, but rather choosing not to save him from the circumstances that the villain created.

T VIGGO MORTENSEN WAS REPORTEDLY APPROACHED TO PLAY HENRI DUCARD BEFORE LIAM NEESON GOT THE ROLE.

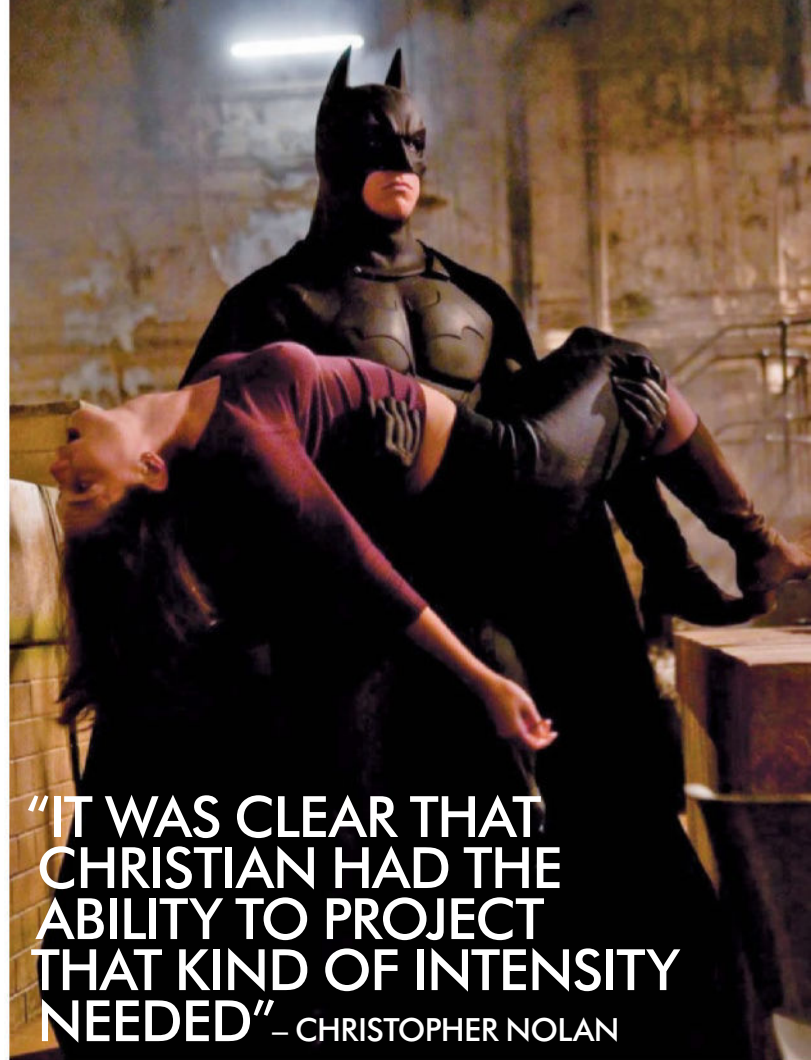
THE CALLING CARD



In a moment of foreboding, Gordon meets with Batman at the newly established Bat-signal, who shows him the calling card of Gotham's newest criminal – the Joker from a deck of cards, connecting Batman's most iconic villain to this impressive retelling of the Batman origin story, as well as teasing the audience for his on-screen outing.

T THE EVIDENCE BAG IN THIS SCENE IS CLEARLY LABELLED 'J KERR', ONE OF THE JOKER'S ALIASES.

"BATMAN BEGINS EXTRACTED DISPARATE ELEMENTS OF THE BATMAN MYTHOLOGY, AND WEAVED THEM TOGETHER"



"IT WAS CLEAR THAT CHRISTIAN HAD THE ABILITY TO PROJECT THAT KIND OF INTENSITY NEEDED" – CHRISTOPHER NOLAN



➤ that resulted in a number of genuinely frightening scenes. The excellent Gary Oldman played a *Year One*-perfect Jim Gordon, while Tom Wilkinson showed us yesterday's model of villain with snarling gangster Carmine Falcone.

The choice of villains was especially interesting. The Joker was of course the obvious candidate, but Nolan had the theme of fear in mind for *Batman Begins* when he decided on the Scarecrow and Ra's. "It really came about as a result of talking to David Goyer about which villains would fit the tone and the themes of what we were doing," Nolan told Blackfilm.com in 2005. "Scarecrow, because of his use of fear as a weapon, presents an interesting parallel to Bruce Wayne's fear as a weapon. Ra's Al Ghul felt like an appropriate villain for us, not because of motivation, which seems contemporary and relevant right now, but because of the

tone of him as a fictional character; I think he's based very much on Bond villains of the Seventies, and that felt like the tone of villain we needed. A memorable, interested, frightening villain."

Yet it's the perfect choice of the intense Christian Bale that fleshed out the tone of the movie. "I chose Christian to play Batman based on that idea, of trying to create a realistic version of the story", explained Nolan to the BBC. "You need an actor like Christian who has sufficient intensity and focus in his eyes to make you believe in the idea that somebody without superpowers – and Bruce Wayne has no superpowers – could, through sheer force of will, change himself into a superhero. I think from meeting Christian, and seeing his other performances, it's clear he has the ability to project that kind of intensity."

There was one statement Bale made at Wonder Con that won the crowd over –

something that confirmed he understood the nuances of the character. "In many ways, the Bruce Wayne character, the playboy, the cad, etc, the business man – he's actually the mask, y'know?" Bale understood that audiences had to take the masked vigilante seriously, so he tapped into the psychology of each successive era of Bruce Wayne, delivering every facade with incredible conviction.

Like many of Nolan's films, *Batman Begins* doesn't follow a strictly linear narrative. It leaps between Bruce Wayne as a child, angry adult, warrior-in-training and eventually the Caped Crusader. This trek forms the first half of the film, giving us a cross-section of Wayne's psyche that even the comic-books rarely bother with today. When he becomes Batman, it's with absolute sincerity, and zero ridiculousness – you're instantly reminded why this character has

BATMAN ON-SCREEN

Modern cinematic interpretations of the Caped Crusader

Weigh in on Joel Schumacher's Bat-nipples at scafinow.co.uk/forum.

BATMAN (1989)



Michael Keaton took the role of Bruce Wayne in Tim Burton's gothic tale. Key parts of comic-book lore were adjusted, but it didn't matter. As a standalone piece, this is still an excellent production, elevated by Jack Nicholson's tremendously disturbed performance as The Joker.

T 50,000 LETTERS OPPOSING THE CASTING OF MICHAEL KEATON WERE SENT TO WARNER DURING THE MOVIE'S PRODUCTION.

BATMAN RETURNS



Burton and Keaton teamed up again in this highly successful sequel, which received flak for the PG-13 rating it got in the States, with some children unable to contend with the frightening imagery. Though not as good as the first film, it was still an entertaining follow-up.

T DANNY DEVITO SPENT TWO HOURS IN MAKE-UP BEFORE COMMENCING FILMING AS THE PENGUIN.

BATMAN FOREVER



With Keaton replaced by Val Kilmer, director Joel Schumacher hatched a follow-up with an overload of colourful imagery. Jim Carrey was cast as The Riddler and Tommy Lee Jones as Two-Face, but neither delivered performances that were anywhere near their best.

T CHRISTIAN BALE WAS ONE OF THE ACTORS WHO AUDITIONED FOR ROBIN, A ROLE THAT WENT TO CHRIS O'DONNELL.

Batman Begins had the benefit of an all-star cast.



endured. To many, *Batman Begins* is the definitive modern interpretation of the Dark Knight. Even the romance with Rachel Dawes isn't a drag, while the off-centre Alfred brings welcome comic relief.

Oddly – perhaps as a result of the preceding *Batman* films' soiled reputation – *Batman Begins* grossed less than half the cash that *Spider-Man 3* raked in two years later. Its reputation then grew over the ensuing three years, resulting in 2008's sequel *The Dark Knight* smashing through the \$1 billion mark, making it the highest-grossing superhero movie to date. *Batman Begins*, though, rescued the Caped Crusader from cinematic oblivion. Critics gave the film heavy praise for its characterisation and themes as much as the scale of its production, while comic-book fans praised the storyline's resonance with the treasured source material.

Nolan coloured the *Batman* mythos with realism, giving it a credibility that made it more than just a superhero movie, leaving it to stand as a character piece in its own right. *Batman Begins* is almost a superhero movie for people who don't like superhero movies – it dwells on the man beneath the mask, asks what it means to truly face injustice, and amounts to far more than a mere reboot. There's often a question of whether *Batman Begins* is inferior to its 2008 sequel, *The Dark Knight*. Such dialogue is relevant, of course, but in terms of bringing a credible *Batman* blockbuster to the big screen and challenging the

fundamentals of superhero movies, this *Batman* was exactly what we needed him to be. 

Batman Begins is available on DVD and Blu-ray.



ORIGINS OF THE TUMBLER

Forgoing the sleek Batmobile designs that were staples of the comic-books and the previous movies based on the *Batman* character, *Batman Begins* features a vehicle that is never actually referred to as the Batmobile. Instead, audiences are treated to the Tumbler, a tank-like vehicle armed with a front-mounted rocket launcher and heavy armour, all of which are factors in the movie's thrilling chase sequence back to the Batcave. As we find out in the second movie, the Tumbler also contains the Batpod, and has the ability to self-destruct.

Four road-ready Tumblers were built for the movie's production at a massive cost of \$250,000 each. The vehicle scored points with comic-book fans due to its resemblance to the Batmobile featured in the legendary comic-book *The Dark Knight Returns*, by Frank Miller. During the story, *Batman* turns up to face a vicious gang with what is essentially a rocket-equipped tank – the Tumbler is a little sleeker, but the similarities are quite obviously there.

WHY IS BATMAN BEGINS A MODERN CLASSIC?

1. TRUE TO THE SOURCE MATERIAL

Batman Begins is an amalgamation of the Dark Knight's greatest adventures in comic-book form, meaning that fans could see elements of the source material coming to life within the film without it conforming to any one storyline.

2. SUPERBLY CAST

Arguably the greatest cast ever assembled for a superhero movie, combining seasoned veterans mixed with the best of Hollywood's up-and-coming talent – and Katie Holmes. The tone of Christopher Nolan's filmmaking is vital to *Batman Begins*' success, but the cast brings the story to life. The strength of Christian Bale's multifaceted performance deserves a lot of credit for that.

3. BATMAN, UNEXPECTED

Batman Begins bucks the trend of how to make a *Batman* movie – with previous iterations, regardless of their strengths, the onus seemed to be on the filmmakers to cram in as many aspects of Bat-lore as possible, focusing on the most recognisable iconography. *Batman Begins* chooses two lesser-known villains and puts the focus of the story on the journey of Bruce Wayne, resulting in a superior movie.

4. REALISM

Batman as a subject matter, as well as the universe he inhabits, is quite obviously the stuff of sci-fi, but Nolan frames the otherworldly context with social decay and a crime-centric narrative. This helped the audience buy into the fact that dressing up like a bat could be taken seriously.

5. THE TUMBLER

Tank Batmobile. Utterly brilliant.

BATMAN & ROBIN



George Clooney took on Bruce Wayne in this disastrous effort – to be fair, he was washed away in a sea of nonsensical design, awful villains and ridiculous sidekicks. "Ice to see you!" It was also a career highlight for Arnold. Clooney probably deserved a better script.

 **BATMAN & ROBIN** WAS NOMINATED FOR 11 RAZZIE AWARDS, INCLUDING WORST PICTURE AND WORST DIRECTOR.

THE DARK KNIGHT



More an epic crime saga in the vein of Michael Mann's *Heat* than a superhero movie, Heath Ledger's Joker and Aaron Eckhart's earnest Harvey Dent take the lead in the record-breaking sequel. It's one of the few films to get the legendary five-star SciFiNow rating.

 **THE DARK KNIGHT** MADE MORE MONEY IN SIX DAYS DOMESTICALLY THAN *BATMAN BEGINS* DID DURING ITS ENTIRE CINEMATIC RUN.

2008
to 2014

THE BRONZE AGE OF SUPERHERO MOVIES

The superhero movie is officially here to stay, and the rules are changing. Marvel Studios begins to build an empire with Iron Man and the Incredible Hulk, while DC comes of age with The Dark Knight. Watchmen and Kick-Ass prove just how versatile the superhero movie can be, while Chronicle brings something new to the table

FEATURED: PAGE 106 IRON MAN

DIRECTOR: Jon Favreau
CAST: Robert Downey Jr, Gwyneth Paltrow
RELEASED: 2 May 2008
● The real joy of *Iron Man* is its humour. It's perfect for those of us who just want to see Tony Stark being Tony Stark.
VERDICT ★★☆☆

THE INCREDIBLE HULK

DIRECTOR: Louis Leterrier
CAST: Edward Norton, Liv Tyler, Tim Roth
RELEASED: 13 June 2008
● The script delivers neither the drama nor the story to match the action that Leterrier orchestrates to such devastating effect.
VERDICT ★★☆☆

KICK-ASS



HELLBOY II

DIRECTOR: Guillermo del Toro
CAST: Ron Perlman, Selma Blair
RELEASED: 11 July 2008
● Del Toro creates a near-endless visual stew of weird and mostly wonderful creatures up on the screen, but sumptuous beasties can't disguise the hollow story.
VERDICT ★★☆☆

FEATURED: PAGE 112 THE DARK KNIGHT

DIRECTOR: Christopher Nolan
CAST: Christian Bale, Heath Ledger
RELEASED: 18 July 2008
● With *The Dark Knight* whenever a tongue threatens toward the cheek, it's unceremoniously stomped on. It hinges on the performances, which are excellent.
VERDICT ★★★★★

PUNISHER: WAR ZONE

DIRECTOR: Lexi Alexander
CAST: Ray Stevenson, Dominic West
RELEASED: 5 December 2008
● Ugly, noisy and violent, *Punisher: War Zone* is despised by the critics and disowned by the fans, but it is the most faithful take on the character to date. Perhaps you just don't like the Punisher.
VERDICT ★★☆☆

THE SPIRIT

DIRECTOR: Frank Miller
CAST: Gabriel Macht, Samuel L Jackson
RELEASED: 25 December 2008
● The fatal flaw of *The Spirit* is that there is nothing for the audience to care about. Just the thought of any of these guys living forever is too much to consider.
VERDICT ★☆☆☆

WATCHMEN

FEATURED: PAGE 118 WATCHMEN

DIRECTOR: Zack Snyder
CAST: Jackie Earle Haley, Patrick Wilson
RELEASED: 6 March 2009
● The story builds to an entertaining crescendo, and the overall effect is at least a very different one from the bilge we're often served by the superhero movie. But it is all in vain as the movie's potential is swamped by its aesthetic and dialogue.
VERDICT ★★☆☆

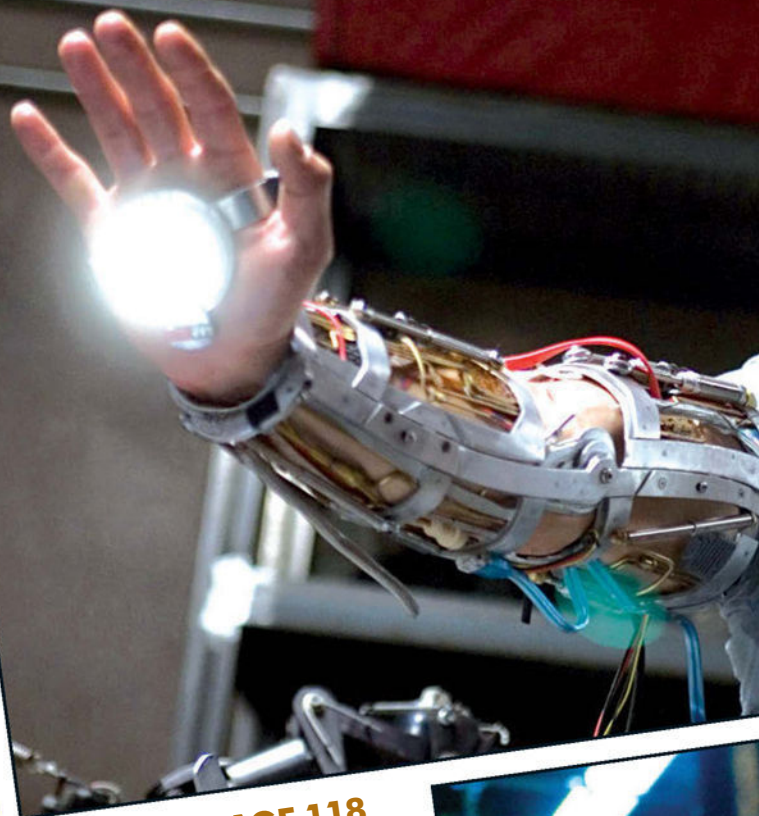
X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE

DIRECTOR: Gavin Hood
CAST: Hugh Jackman, Liev Schreiber
RELEASED: 1 May 2009
● *Wolverine's* biggest problem is that there's little here to get the pulse racing. For a summer blockbuster, that's disappointing. For a *Wolverine* film, that's hard to forgive.
VERDICT ★★☆☆

FEATURED: PAGE 122 KICK-ASS

DIRECTOR: Matthew Vaughn
CAST: Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Nicolas Cage, Chloë Grace Moretz
RELEASED: 16 April 2010
● Vaughn and Goldman, with more than a little help from Millar's subversive source material, turn comic-book movie conventions on their head.
VERDICT ★★★★★

BATMAN





IRON MAN

IRON MAN 2

DIRECTOR: Jon Favreau
CAST: Robert Downey Jr, Mickey Rourke, Gwyneth Paltrow

RELEASED: 7 May 2010

● While the first *Iron Man* felt like a short boost away from our world, the sequel seems to be three or four, presenting a cartoon reality that's much harder to invest in or engage with.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

DEFENDOR

DIRECTOR: Peter Stebbings
CAST: Woody Harrelson, Kat Dennings
RELEASED: 13 May 2010

● Tough to disentangle from James Gunn's *Super*, *Defendor* is stronger for the comparison. Just as funny, just as tragic and every bit as grim, *Defendor* makes you care about its misguided would-be crimefighter.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

SUPER

DIRECTOR: James Gunn
CAST: Rainn Wilson, Ellen Page, Liv Tyler
RELEASED: 1 April 2011

● Ironically referencing comic-book characters at regular intervals, *Super* stands less as a satire of superhero clichés than it does a riposte to the audience's expectations of them – flitting from indie whimsy to blood-gushing violence and back again.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

THOR

DIRECTOR: Kenneth Branagh
CAST: Chris Hemsworth, Tom Hiddleston
RELEASED: 6 May 2011

● Branagh's adaptation is certainly worth seeing, even if just for the way in which it broadens the remit of superhero movies.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

X-MEN: FIRST CLASS

DIRECTOR: Matthew Vaughn
CAST: James McAvoy, Michael Fassbender
RELEASED: 3 June 2011

● If Matthew Vaughn's power is of mesmerising illusions, then he at least made us forget we were hurtling toward "Do you know what happens to a toad when it's struck by lightning?" It comes with a sense of charm, warmth and fun.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

GREEN LANTERN

DIRECTOR: Martin Campbell
CAST: Ryan Reynolds, Blake Lively
RELEASED: 17 June 2011

● What works so well in comic-book form transitions to the screen with mixed results, but if you're uttering the Green Lantern oath under your breath on either of the two stirring occasions that Jordan recites it himself, you'll get some enjoyment.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE FIRST AVENGER

DIRECTOR: Joe Johnston
CAST: Chris Evans, Hayley Atwell
RELEASED: 22 July 2011

● *Captain America* reminds the audience that a superhero film doesn't have to be as gritty as *The Dark Knight* or as post-modern as *Kick-Ass* to be taken seriously.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

CHRONICLE

DIRECTOR: Josh Trank
CAST: Dane DeHaan, Alex Russell
RELEASED: 3 February 2012

● Trank and Landis's found-footage flick does what many 'real world superhero movies' fail to do, showing us not just a setting, but reactions. With great power comes no responsibility, bro.

VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

GHOST RIDER: SPIRIT OF VENGEANCE

DIRECTORS: Mark Neveldine, Brian Taylor
CAST: Nicolas Cage, Ciarán Hinds
RELEASED: 17 February 2012

Despite the promises of the *Crank* duo, *Ghost Rider's* wheels are so firmly clamped by the 12A rating that it's never as mad, violent and stupid as it should be; just crass, boring and shit.

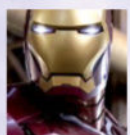
VERDICT ★☆☆☆☆







2008'S IRON MAN TOOK AN OBSCURE CHARACTER AND A TROUBLED STAR AND TURNED MARVEL INTO A BLOCKBUSTER BEHEMOTH, HELPING THE MCU WE KNOW AND LOVE TODAY



Eighteen years is a long time for a movie to be in development. Universal Studios began developing *Iron Man* all the way back in 1990 and then it ended up at 20th Century Fox in 1996. New Line got the option in 2000 but Marvel re-acquired the rights back in 2006.

The genre landscape had changed so dramatically between the time when Tony Stark was first picked up to when Marvel began to put it into production: Marvel had a palpable hit with *Blade* in 1998, which made a cool \$70 million at the US box office, triggering off the trend for Marvel Comics adaptations for the big screen that were reasonably faithful to the source material. Nicolas Cage was attached to play Stark, as was Tom Cruise but it languished in turnaround for years. However, Favreau seemed to have a good handle on his take on the project back in 2006 when he was first announced as its director. "I think that now, through motion-capture and the integration of miniatures with CGI, like in *King Kong*, I'm starting to be a lot more convinced by what the technology can do. But the idea of using CGI and relying solely on that to tell your story, those days are past. I think that integrating practical filmmaking and augmenting it with CGI is the key to making it an emotionally involved story." ➤

THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK

A brief history of Iron Man

Created in 1963, first appearing in the title *Tales Of Suspense* #39 (originally designed as a horror book), the character ran until #99, when the title changed its name to *Captain America*. His grey costume was replaced by the familiar red-and-gold in *Tales Of Suspense* #48. Stark became Iron Man when he was injured in Vietnam (later the Gulf War when Marvel rewrote his origin) and forced to don the suit to save his life. Iron Man debuted in his own title, *The Invincible Iron Man*, in 1968 and has been a member of Marvel's flagship group The Avengers almost since the start. His company developed weapons for the US Government and its covert offshoot SHIELD (Supreme Headquarters International Espionage Law-enforcement Division). He fought villains like The Mandarin and The IronMonger. He gave up the suit to his close friend Jim Rhodes (who Stark met while Rhodes was a military helicopter pilot) on a couple of occasions, most notably when his alcoholism became too much. Stark worked with Rhodes during the *Armor Wars* story in the 1990s and helped him rebuild his company. His armour even took on a life of its own and killed villain Whiplash but destroyed itself to save its creator, Stark, giving him its cybernetic heart. Currently in the wake of Marvel's *Civil War* epic, with his friends Captain America and Goliath dead,

Tony Stark has become SHIELD's director.

The action-packed *Iron Man* was the first body blow in the march toward *Avengers Assemble*.

Behold, the Iron Monger armour!

"I THINK PEOPLE ARE GOING TO FIND THAT IT'S VERY FAITHFUL TO THE COMIC. I'M PRETTY PROUD THAT WE'VE DONE A VERSION OF THE ORIGIN STORY"

Getting Robert Downey Jr on board seemed like an odd choice when it was first revealed but for the actor, it was a comfortable fit. "I went to Avi Arad's offices in Beverly Hills, which was a little intimidating. You see all those posters of what he's been involved in and you go, 'Oh wow! I wonder if I could get a job with these guys?' And I was literally walking in for a general meeting and there's Jon [Favreau] and I'm like 'hey, hey' and then I'm in this boardroom. They basically interviewed me for a while and I think I did okay and I left. Jon said, 'I think you'd be great. The board members back in New York won't do it but I would like to have you...' So I said, 'I really think it's meant to be...' and Avi walked me out and said, 'I really like you'. Then a couple of months later I screen tested, did well and here we are. Kind of like Chaplin. Same deal, different decade."

Marvel's president of production, Kevin Feige, was a big supporter of casting him in the main role. "Downey frankly is one of the best actors we've ever worked with. I think he is one of the best actors of our time." In fact, he thought that Downey was the perfect choice for this movie: "Tony Stark is an interesting character because he's got a lot of attributes that may not be the most likeable. He's extremely wealthy. He's extremely successful and extremely smart. He can be cocky and we needed somebody who could embody that but still be charming and still be likeable and I think that's what Downey does perfectly."

Downey Jr has Stark's big ego down cold.

The executive was very keen to keep the spirit of the character: "I think people are going to find that it's very faithful to the comic. I'm pretty proud that we've done a version of the origin story. There were a lot of scripts that had been developed over the years. All of them, you know, had some strengths and some weaknesses but none of them were as true as we're being right now, just because it was really something that, when we sat down with Jon [Favreau], we connected to. The truth is, as Stan Lee mentioned, he put him right into the present day conflict of Vietnam at the time. While we don't necessarily define it exactly, it certainly made sense to update it in the Middle East."

Iron Man is the first Marvel film to be produced by the company itself and Feige points out that this is a natural progression of what Marvel has been doing over the past five years. "The audience needs to realise these are going to be the exact same kind of movies that have come before with the *X-Men* and the *Spider-Men* and the quality will remain the same because, frankly, we always were part of those decisions, whether it's to stay perfectly true to something or to take a little bit of a chance with the material. It has always come from a place of keeping true to the core story, so now it's just

**“CREATING
SOMETHING
THAT LOOKED
CREDIBLE ON
SCREEN WAS AS
IMPORTANT AS
MAKING A CONCEPT
THAT LOOKED
IMPRESSIVE”**

The decision to cast Downey Jr as Tony Stark was inspired.

a little bit more responsibility when it comes to managing the productions. But we were always a part of hiring every member but now we sign the paycheques as well.”

Talking of paycheques, unlike the big Hollywood blockbusters of yore, a movie like *Iron Man* didn't need to have a huge star to open it, something that Jon Favreau saw as a selling point for the industry high-ups. “What's nice is that those movies don't require an expensive star; Iron Man's the star, the superhero is the star,” Favreau said. “The success of *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* without being star-driven pieces reassures [executives] that the film does have an upside commercially.”

Fitting the bill perfectly was acclaimed actor Robert Downey Jr, whose chequered past seemed to be compatible with the complex character of Tony Stark. As Jon Favreau discusses: “It seems to me that from his very inception, Tony Stark was a very conflicted guy. Even Stan Lee talks in interviews about how he wanted to make a character and raise the bar in likeability as far as he could by making a weapons designer on the cusp of the Vietnam War. The thinking was: ‘If I can make them like this guy, I can make

them like anybody.’ Here he is an egotistical, self-absorbed billionaire genius playboy and so he's not exactly the underdog that Peter Parker is. What interested me is that he was very much in the gunfighter tradition, living by certain rules and the Marvel tradition embraces flawed heroes.”

Downey, in real life, reflected this flawed persona that he would be playing on screen. “We didn't want to just go with a safe choice,” Favreau stated. “The best and worst moments of Robert's life have been in the public eye. He had to find an inner balance to overcome obstacles that went far beyond his career. That's Tony Stark.”

Jeff Bridges, cast here as villain Obadiah Stane, is not an obvious choice for *Iron Man* either but he was optimistic when he spoke about his experiences. “It's been wonderful working with [director] Jon Favreau, who's a wonderful actor as well, who I've admired for a long time. [Robert Downey Jr and I] were doing a lot of improvisation in *Iron Man* to discover scenes and getting off of the written page and doing a lot of work like that. I know that Jon is very interested in grounding it in as much reality as he possibly can. That's informing the whole thing. Like the suit for ➤

TALES OF SUSPENSE

Iron Man has been a regular fixture of the Marvel Universe almost since the beginning and here are a few of his greatest stories

Tales Of Suspense #39 (1963)

The story that started it all, written by Stan Lee, brother Larry Lieber and drawn by Don Heck and Jack Kirby, debuted the grey tincan suit and a flawed character very much in the classic Marvel mould.



Tales Of Suspense #45 (1963)

Pepper Potts, Stark's secretary, makes her first bow here. The character had worked for Tony Stark's father, Howard, and stayed on when Tony took over.



Tales Of Suspense #48 (1963)

The first time Iron Man wears his now-familiar red-and-gold costume, drawn by Steve Ditko, best-known as the artist on Marvel's *Spider-Man*.



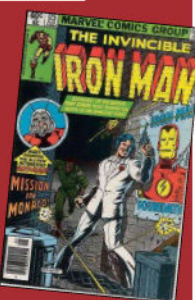
Iron Man #118 (1979)

Iron Man #118 features the first appearance of Jim Rhodes, Tony Stark's friend from the Vietnam War. This issue also sees Stark discover that SHIELD, Marvel's government-run organisation, owns shares in Stark Enterprises.



Iron Man #120-128 (1978-1979)

The 'Demon In A Bottle' storyline by writer David Michelinie and artist Bob Layton pitted Stark against an enemy no high-tech suit could defeat: alcoholism. The story introduced Justin Hammer, a corporate raider intent on taking over Stark's company.



Iron Man #163 (1982)

Written and drawn by Jim Starlin (*Warlock*), this is the first appearance of Obadiah Stane aka Iron Monger (played by Jeff Bridges in the movie). Stane was a fierce business rival of Tony Stark who hires Indries Moonji, who pretends to be Stark's love interest to destroy him. Heartbroken, Stark turns to alcohol.



The Ultimates #1-3 (2002)

Written by Scottish scripter Mark Millar and drawn spectacularly by Brit artist Bryan Hitch with Andrew Currie and Paul

Neary, *The Ultimates* unveiled an alternate Marvel Universe, designed to be accessible to the general public. It was in this series that Marvel altered Nick Fury to resemble Samuel Jackson, a trick picked up by the moviemakers. The head of SHIELD is Nick Fury, played in the movie by Samuel Jackson himself!

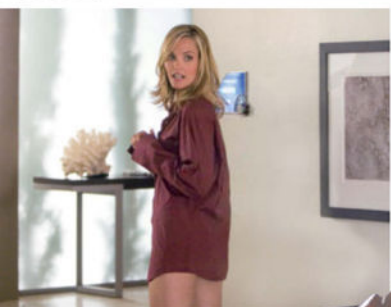




THE BRONZE AGE

IRON MAN

Iron Man has a streak of post-modernism missing from many comic adaptations.



It's great to see the costume designers have remained faithful to the iconic suit.

instance. The first suit looks very primitive. It looks like, 'Oh yeah, maybe that could happen.' It's all plausible."

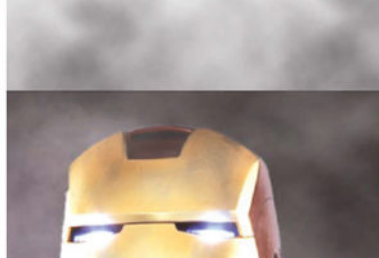
Iron Man's "plausible" armour does have a direct connection to the comics industry with its concept designer Adi Granov, a Bosnian comic artist who has worked for Marvel on the influential *Iron Man: Extremis* story arc. "I worked on the film as an illustrator and concept designer," Granov explained. "I also art directed some of the 3D modelling and generally consulted on the vision of *Iron Man*. It's been fantastic, really."

In fact, the artist had a lot of leeway on the project, far more than you would have assumed with a movie of this nature. "I had a lot more freedom to do my thing than I would've ever thought possible on such a high-profile project," he admits. "It really helped that Jon [Favreau] is very interested in the design and very much into the whole idea development process. The art team on the film was fantastic and our vision of what we tried to achieve translated exactly to the finished product, which is remarkable."

For the artist, creating something that looked credible on screen was as important as making a concept that looked impressive visually. "As in my comic work, in my designs I try to achieve a level of believability that whatever it is I am designing could, on some level, exist in the real world, even if it is a flying mechanical suit of armour."



Iron Man is out now on DVD and Blu-ray.



An interview with... JON FAVREAU

An exclusive interview with the director of Iron Man

What can the audience expect from Iron Man?

For this thing to work, to make sense for Marvel to be in the movie business, it has to attract people who don't know anything about the film or about the character. We have tried to make things a little bit more plausible here so that people will get it rather than just feel like, "Oh it's just a comic book movie, so anything could happen." We also have a cast that is a little bit more broadly appealing so that people who wouldn't normally come to a Marvel-style film might give this a chance. But for the fans, we wanted to have enough stuff happening in there that it seemed like we were either staying



Iron Man versus the Iron Monger.



Iron Man brings the armour to life as a piece of convincing military hardware.



Gwyneth Paltrow as love interest Pepper Potts.

“YOU HAVE TO CONVINCE THEM THAT YOU’RE NOT JUST PUTTING THEM IN A PIECE OF CRAP”

true to or making a choice to go against what their expectations might be, based on the books. In the books he was in Vietnam, so let’s make it Afghanistan in the movie. How do you at least acknowledge what the source material has to say? In the case of Jarvis we decided to take a leap there and I’m sure there are certain things that we will be crucified for and there are certain things that we will be celebrated for. But I think in the casting of Downey Jr and the tone of it, it has that irreverence that I have always associated with the Marvel brand. So we have tried to maintain that without ever undermining the reality of the situation.

Now you’re at the other side of one of your biggest budget movies, how do you feel?

I feel like there’s never enough money, no matter how much you have, because you’re always trying to put more on the screen than you’ve got. I feel like there should be another name for a director of these movies because when you direct a comedy,

you write the script, you make a few jokes and then you edit it together. Then you pick a composer, you lay the music down and you mix it. You walk away and maybe it’s a year of your life. Here you are literally inventing a world or defining a world based on one that somebody else has invented. Then that’s informed by the cast that you have to get approved and you have to convince them that you’re not just putting them in a piece of crap. Fortunately, in my generation, there’s enough people who love Marvel that it doesn’t just feel the way it must have felt when Alec Guinness was offered Obi-Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars*.

It’s not just the success of the box office for the cast, which is something I had to explain to my bosses. But when I asked Downey: “What do you want to do now in your career?” he said: “I want to make movies that I’m proud of that people see.” That might sound like the most obvious statement but it really isn’t because actors go through a stage where they want

to make movies they’re proud of. A movie’s a medium, not a piece of art and a medium requires you to communicate with somebody else for you to fulfil its aims.

When Robert Downey Jr was first cast, reaction was mixed. Can you reiterate why he was the man for the job?

He’s always been my guy because he was going to make the movie I’m proud of. I haven’t seen all of his work but he certainly does something interesting all the time and I really like that kind of likeable asshole that he can play. I gravitate to that most of the time in my writing and my voice as a filmmaker. But Robert’s one of the few actors that can really be likeable and you could really load up his saddlebags with

Could a sequel explore the alcohol abuse from the ‘Demon In A Bottle’ storyline from the comic book?

You can see that this movie could lead to that. I think once people accept him in this role and accept Iron Man, you have a lot of latitude as to what you could do with the franchise. If you look at *Dark Knight*, it looks very dark but people have accepted it. This first film is about teaching who these characters are and then based on where it goes, we’ll figure out what’s appropriate. As one of the comic book’s strongest stories, ‘Demon In A Bottle’ is certainly something we’re considering.

There’s been reports that there are scenes in each of Marvel’s various movies that

will refer to each other. How much can you reveal about this?

I don’t wanna blow

“AT THE END OF THE HORIZON THE PLAN IS FOR AN AVENGERS MOVIE”

shit and it can work. The speech he gives about the missiles, saying “I don’t like the weapon you have to fire, I like the weapon you only have to fire once. That’s how Dad did it, that’s how America does it and it’s worked out pretty well.” That’s a tough mouthful and we came up with that on the set and he pulls it off. Stark doesn’t understand what his weapons are doing to people; it’s a game to him. In fact, we filmed it that way and then we turned it around and we show him seeing one of his own mortars almost take him out and kill servicemen, so it becomes a little bit like *A Christmas Carol*. He plays that progression in a real emotional way where he’s not winking his way through it and that’s why I love Robert because he brings an authenticity to it. He’s hit the reset button on his career and to be accepted in this, the most mainstream of roles that you can get, is a real victory for him on a lot of levels.

anything and also I don’t honestly know where it’s going to land. I know that at the end of the horizon the plan is for an *Avengers* movie, so the idea is to have chapters with all of the characters that would lead there, which might get you over the third movie hump of ‘what do you do differently without creating something that’s completely arbitrary to keep it interesting’. I’ve heard that your second movie in a franchise is always the fun one.

So would you feel comfortable if this movie does well and they turn around and say “Iron Man 2 has been given the green light. Would you like to do another one?”

Definitely, me and Robert would. There’s always ways to fumble the football. But as long as everybody feels respected and creatively it emulates this process, I would [like to do another *Iron Man* movie] for sure.



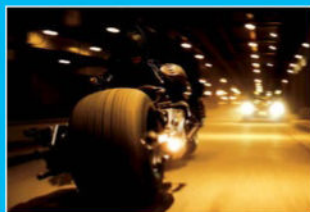
Stark is a world away from the standard superhero alter ego.

WHERE DOES HE GET THOSE WONDERFUL TOYS?

Batman's back, and he's suited and booted and ready for battle

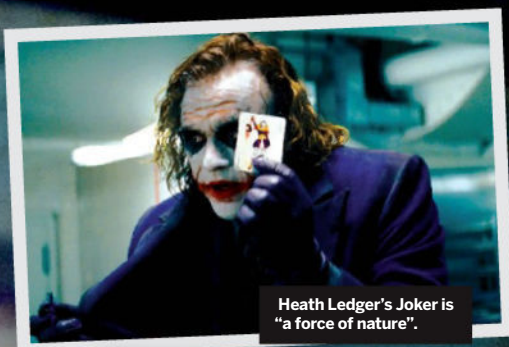
Bats is toting some new and improved Wayne Enterprises gadgets this time. The Batsuit itself has been redesigned, featuring sonar detection and razors on its forearms, which can be fired. Hydraulics in the gloves allow him to crush objects, and the head-piece has been reshaped. Separate from the rest of the suit, which is made up of 200 pieces, it allows Batman to move his head (the first time the suit has allowed this). "I thought it would make it more interesting to look at," costume designer Linda Hemming says.

Production designer Nathan Crowley, who created the look of the new Batmobile, the 'Tumbler', for *Begins*, has been back, the fruits of his labours being the Batpod, a two-wheel monstrosity armed with grappling hooks, canons and machine guns. Add to this the latest gizmos from Lucius Fox and this is the most tooled up Batman yet.



GOTHAM NEEDS YOU

After the low-key *Batman Begins*, 2008's *The Dark Knight* put the series, its stars and its creators right at the cutting edge of the superhero revolution. Prior to the film's release, we looked at how this ambitious sequel came together...



Heath Ledger's Joker is "a force of nature".



Christian Bale returns as Gotham's saviour, Batman.



Christopher Nolan was a somewhat untested quantity when he signed on for 2005's *Batman Begins*. Untested in the eyes of the studios who saw him as an independent director who had achieved cult fame with *Memento* before moving up a gear and scoring some much needed star kudos with the Al Pacino and Robin Williams thriller *Insomnia*. He was also an untested quantity, though, in the eyes of all the Batman fans out there. Their hero had been so strikingly realised in 1989 by Tim Burton, only to then be subjected to the sort of cinematic embarrassments that can be so crudely dished out these days: rubber nipples on the Batsuit, an increasingly Happy Meal-friendly, DayGlo-coloured Gotham City. The Caped Crusader had certainly been through the wringer, and so when Nolan was announced as the director, fans were understandably anxious. So too were the suits at Warner Bros., who knew that this was the final roll of the dice for their franchise – another duffer and the Bat would most likely be dead for good. Nolan, though, was more than up to the task and *Batman Begins* managed the nigh on impossible – it was a commercial success that also delighted the fans and the critics. It has now become shorthand for directors when discussing the direction for their latest project, and is regarded as one of the best, comic-book movies ever committed to celluloid and with the sequel, *The Dark Knight*, it looks like Chris Nolan is set to rewrite the rulebook once more.

From *Begins'* final reel kiss-off announcing there was a new criminal in town, the wait for Nolan's follow-up has been intense. David S Goyer had penned a story for two sequels following his work on the screenplay for *Begins* and much of this initial treatment remains, only it has been condensed into the one film rather than spread over two. "I don't think in terms of sequels," Christopher Nolan, who wrote the script for *The Dark Knight* with his brother 'Jonah', told website IGN, "I think in terms of making this film the best it can be and the most

THE BRONZE AGE

THE DARK KNIGHT



Alongside the Tumbler sits the Batpod, designed for ease of travel around Gotham City.



Gotham's fate hangs in the balance as a new breed of criminal arrives on the scene.



As with *Batman Begins*, much of *The Dark Knight* shoot took place in Chicago.



The Dark Knight Swoops

Kicking off last year long in advance of the film's release, and indeed in advance of even the first trailer for the film, Warner Bros. pushed a devilishly inventive marketing campaign for the film that reached much further than the usual promo/TV spot/one-sheet approach.

The Gotham Times

A website for 'The Gotham Times' was launched, reporting on the corruption that's engulfing the streets of the city. It resurfaced

later in a Joker-defaced form entitled 'The HaHaHa Times'.

I Believe in Harvey Dent

Offering updates and info on the Gotham District Attorney, the I Believe In Harvey Dent website was subjected to assaults from the Joker too, who 'circulated' his own take on Dent's campaign flyers.

Why So Serious?

Launched during the 2007 Comic-Con, WhySoSerious.com sent fans on a US-wide

scavenger hunt based on key American cities in order to unlock a teaser trailer for the movie, as well as a new photo of the Joker. The campaign was rejigged in the wake of Heath Ledger's death.

Poster campaign

Not viral in any manner of speaking, but the glorious one-sheets created for the movie captured the mood and tone of Bats and Gotham City and were the very finest examples of the modern movie poster art form.

complete film it can be." A bold remark, and one that were it to come from any other director, you would dismiss as marketing propaganda, but from Nolan, you're hard pressed *not* to believe him. The evidence speaks for itself.

Back, in what is the first film in the franchise not to feature 'Batman' in the title, are many of the elements that made *Begins* so great, chiefly, the cast, or what is otherwise known as the 'greatest-cast-assembled-for-a-comic-book-movie ever!' Gary Oldman as Lieutenant Gordon, Morgan Freeman as Lucius Fox, and Cillian Murphy as Scarecrow are all back reprising their roles, so too is Christian Bale as Bruce Wayne, who finds himself working with Nolan for the third time now. So what is it about the London-born writer/producer/director that he finds so appealing? "[Chris] isn't going to be making a movie if he's not going to be doing something very different with it," Bale says, tantalisingly hinting that *The Dark Knight* will go far beyond what we expect even them to deliver.

Nolan has added to the roster further, though, filling out his cast to make the most impressive ensemble since... well, since *Batman Begins*. "We have a terrific casting director, John Papsidera, who just comes up with great ideas," Nolan has said. "He introduced me to fantastic people; when you think about an actor like Eric Roberts [Julia Roberts' bro plays mob boss Sal Maroni], or any of these guys, they can just take a scene and take a character and find something in him, in a moment, and give you more

depth than you'd usually have." Joining Roberts among the ranks of newbies are the likes of former Bratpacker turned genre star Anthony Michael Hall as a Gotham City reporter entangled in the city's fireball of a criminal underbelly, *Lost*'s Nestor Carbonell as the city Mayor, and Michael Jai White (of comic book *Spawn* infamy) as Gamble, a decidedly unruly gang leader. Maggie Gyllenhaal also steps into the fold to replace the actress-turned-mum Katie Holmes as Rachel Dawes but, of course, Nolan's ace in the hole has always been the casting of one role in particular...

Paul Bettany, Adrien Brody and Lachy Hulme (Sparks in *The Matrix*) were all in the running for the most coveted of roles in the film – that of the Joker. Jack Nicholson was 'furious' he was not cast (really, what is he thinking?); heck, even Robin Williams expressed an interest in the role at one point. Nolan, though, had his sights set firmly on one man from the start. In July 2006, Heath Ledger was cast, the reaction to which was equal parts surprise, shock, and unbridled glee. Ledger had seen an opening for a new portrayal of the 'grim jester', and his vision for the Joker was one that Nolan shared. A vision which, unlike Nicholson's interpretation almost 20 years prior, passed over the clown's comedy in favour of a more vital, more visceral approach. "I'd met with Heath before several times on projects in the past and nothing had ever come of it," Nolan says of the process leading up to his casting. "He'd heard I was looking for someone to play the ➤



The Joker reignites Gotham's criminal underworld, creating more trouble than Bats can handle.





**"LEDGER'S PSYCHO
IS CERTAINLY
SOMETHING WE HAVE
NEVER SEEN BEFORE"**

Interview © Cinefirsttext

A walk on the wild side



Heath Ledger's tragic death cast a shadow over The Dark Knight's production. In one of his final interviews, the actor speaks about his take on the Clown Prince of Crime **WORDS LYNLEY DWIGHT**

Was it daunting taking on such an iconic role?

I feared it, but anything that scares me, excites me at the same time. I certainly had to put on a brave face and believe that I had something up my sleeve that was different.

Did you watch any of the Jack Nicholson stuff?

Not after I got the role, but I'd seen it many times before. There's a big difference between a Chris Nolan film and a Tim Burton film and so there was enough room for a fresh portrayal. I've kind of steered away from what Jack did, hopefully.

How did you build your character? Did you start with the comics or the movies?

A bit of both, I sat in a hotel room in London for about a month and experimented. I ended up making him within the realm of a psychopath, with no conscience towards his acts, which is fun because there's no limits to what he would say or what he would do.

Chris [Nolan] and I saw eye to eye on how the character should be played, and so I went away, found it, and came back.

Is there the idea that the Joker may have once been a normal person?

Yeah, I think most of the villains in the Chris Nolan style of Batman movies are normal people, or once were normal people but I definitely came to my own conclusions to his background.

How long does it take to put the face on?

An hour and a half, it's pretty quick.

Does it help you create the character easier?

Yeah, it's the icing on the cake for all the research that you do prior to shooting. There's something about working behind a mask, it gives

you the licence to do whatever you want, free of feeling like you're being judged or viewed. I remember going into this thinking it would be PG-13 but I wanted to present an X-rated performance, if I could. So that's what I've been going for.

Has it been a physical shoot?

It has been, yeah, but I enjoy that. I get battered and bruised, but I like feeling pain too, it's kind of acting. Christian's beaten me up a couple of times through the film; he actually punched me in the jaw at one point!

Really?

Yeah, not hard. He was a total gentleman about it.

How was it working with such an all-star cast?

The cast is outstanding; every single one of these people has inspired me at some point, it's ridiculous. My first scene was with Gary Oldman, which was mind-blowing.

What is it that sets Chris Nolan apart from other directors?

He's so young, but seems so old and he's just incredibly mature and organised and relaxed on set... I couldn't imagine what it's like directing a movie this size, but he manages to keep a clear head and he's super organised but he really just shoots as he goes too, he's very flexible in that way.

Were there any hairy moments during the shoot?

No, Christian went and stood up on the Sears Tower himself; they took him up to the very top where they put him on a thin wire and he just leaned off the edge. There's been a lot of car chases and an IMAX camera got busted up but they just replaced it and kept on shooting.

Did you have fun in this role?

Yeah, it's the most fun I've had playing a role.



Gotham Knights

The key players in Gotham City's fight for survival

Bruce Wayne (Christian Bale)

1 Emboldened by his becoming 'the Bat' and forging all of his pent up 'frustrations' fuelled by the murder of his parents, billionaire Bruce Wayne faces his toughest test yet from the criminal underworld of Gotham, who will force him to dig deep and confront his newfound power to keep the city's inhabitants safe.

Joker (Heath Ledger)

2 A "psychopathic, mass-murdering, schizophrenic clown with zero empathy," according to Heath Ledger, the Joker in *The Dark Knight* rejuvenates Gotham's criminal element and pushes them into creating that which civilised society abhors: chaos.

Harvey Dent/Two-Face (Aaron Eckhart)

3 The Gotham district attorney, Dent, is initially the 'white knight of the city', a driven and determined figure who Wayne sees as a spiritual compatriot. A close encounter with a nasty crim, though, hideously disfigures him, leaving him as a murderous vigilante.

Lt James Gordon (Gary Oldman)

4 Lieutenant Gordon stands out in the Gotham City police department on account of his honesty and refusal to bow to corruption, the opposite of which

have become pandemic in the city's 'serve and protect' department. His integrity is called into question, though, by his associations with Batman, and later with Dent.

Lucius Fox (Morgan Freeman)

5 Newly promoted to CEO of Wayne Enterprises, at the expense of Earle, Fox is the engineering wunderkind who supplies Bruce with the gear, the gadgets, and all the rest of the clobber he needs to pull off his crime-fighting escapades. Also the designer of the 'Tumbler'.

Salvatore Maroni (Eric Roberts)

6 After the departure at the hands of Batman of Carmine Falcone, the crime lord's mob needed a new leader and so in stepped Sal Maroni, the new face of organised crime in the city. With the Joker on hand, though, to throw a spanner in the works, and competition in the face of Gambler, he's far from easy street.

Gambler (Michael Jai White)

7 The horrific extent of organised crime in the city is bad enough, but adding fuel to the already combustible fire is criminal-on-criminal fighting, which forms the very heart of "Gotham's ongoing mob war". At the centre of this stands Gambler, a vicious gang leader at war with Sal Maroni and his newly-inherited mob.

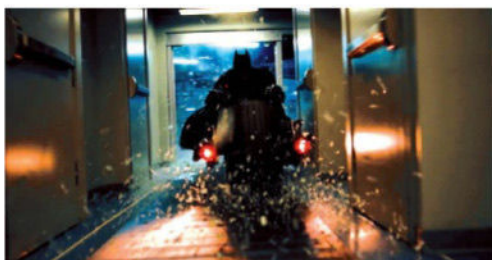
Joker and we met and we got each other. We both had exactly the same concept in our heads of who that guy would be – it was about a psychological concept, it was about a character concept, it was about the threat of anarchy." Forgoing an origin story for Batman's iconic nemesis, the Joker is part riotous punk, part deranged mass murderer, and Ledger's psycho is something we have certainly not seen before. "The Joker cuts through the film, he's got no story arc," Nolan revealed, "he's just a force of nature tearing through [the film]. Heath has given an amazing performance in the role, it's really extraordinary." Extraordinary as it is, people's eyes will be glued to his portrayal for other reasons now, in the light of Ledger's tragic death earlier this year from an accidental prescription drug overdose. The Joker took centre stage in the film's promo campaign, his disfigured visage and trademark green and purple colour scheme adorning the film's one-sheet campaign and various viral websites, but his prominence has been something of a red herring, an example both of Nolan's penchant for misdirection and of his grasp of storytelling. The film's true focus is directed towards another new character.

Aaron Eckhart had originally been in line to take the lead in Nolan's breakout hit, 2000's chronology-inverting puzzle piece *Memento*, but it wasn't to be. He finally gets to work with the director now, though, taking on the role of Gotham's District Attorney Harvey Dent. Originally one of Gotham's shining new lights, Dent

represents a possible future for the city, a future unshrouded by crime and violence. An encounter with some acid, though, as any DC fan would tell you, leaves Dent terminally disfigured, the spiritual and moral fortitude which had presented him as an ally of Bruce Wayne banished for good. "Harvey Dent turns into Two-Face in this movie," Eckhart exclaimed on the film's Chicago set, with a fervent and barely contained sense of excitement. Eckhart, similar to Ledger and in keeping with Nolan's striving for creating something new and original, saw the character of Dent as an opportunity devoid of constraints. "Chris comes at this with such a different take on Batman," he has explained, "that I didn't feel I had to be true to any other actor playing the role. Of course, I read the comic books; I think Harvey is portrayed very well in those, his relationships with Lt Gordon, with Batman, with Gotham, those really helped me the most."

Dent's transformation is emblematic of the predicament Gotham is facing, "the city is going through a dark time," as Eckhart expresses. It also forms the heart of *The Dark Knight's* journey. "As we looked through the comics, there was this fascinating idea that Batman's presence in Gotham actually attracts criminals, [it] attracts lunacy," Nolan has reasoned of the film's raison d'être. "When you're dealing with questionable notions like people taking the law into their own hands, you have to really ask, where does that lead?" Things in Gotham are going

Ledger's passing cast a shadow over the film and its production.





to get a whole lot worse, though, before they start to get better, Nolan explains, the film's overriding theme being that of the perils of revenge and its relationship to its opposition: justice. Where does the validation for a person's actions lie? Are their means vindicated by the result? With the escalation that threatens to engulf the city, what is the dividing line between good and evil, between sanity and insanity, between a masked vigilante and a make-up adorned criminal?

Nolan was so enamoured with the city of Chicago in which much of *Begins'* filming was done, that he re-camped to the Windy City once more for the follow-up. The opening sequence, the bank heist in which we are first introduced to the Joker, was lensed there, as were many of the movie's other key scenes, with the film's production also taking in shooting stints in locations as varied as Baltimore, Los Angeles, Chertsey in Surrey as well as Hong Kong. Production designer Nathan Crowley has also been tweaking the Gotham visuals since the last time. "I've tried to unclutter the Gotham we created on the last film," he says of *Dark Knight's* stunningly evocative sets. The film has also allowed Nolan to finally indulge his IMAX fascinations. For too long, he had wanted to shoot using the format, and with *The Dark Knight* he has at long last been

able to do so, shooting four of the film's set pieces for IMAX's towering screens.

The drip-feeding of images from the film and the inspired marketing campaign (see 'Dark Knight Swoops' boxout) has been measured to perfection, stoking up audiences' anticipation to near breaking point. Since the first images appeared over a year ago, expectation has swelled from Bat-fans, to movie fans, to a full on crescendo incorporating everyone else. Such high levels of expectation, though, can do the movie in question damage if they are not fully realised – Spielberg's damp squib of an *Indiana Jones* movie is a regretful case in point – but such a pitfall is unlikely to catch Nolan. Scratch that, such a pitfall would never catch Nolan; he is far too astute a filmmaker for that. He's a master storyteller who has proved his ability to confound expectations, and his precision control ensured that *The Dark Knight* triumphs. The only problem is that Nolan set a precedent so high that the third film in the series, *The Dark Knight Rises*, paled in comparison.

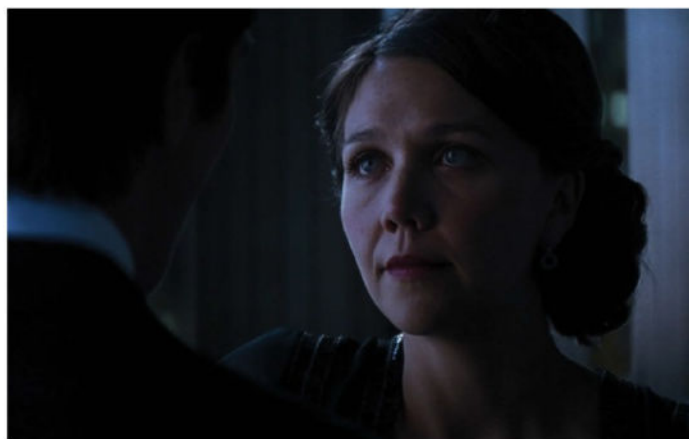


The Dark Knight stands, unarguably, as the strongest part of the Nolan trilogy. ☞

The Dark Knight is out now on DVD and Blu-ray.



Ledger portrayed the Joker as an anarchist shorn of emotions such as empathy.



Harvey Dent's arc was in many ways the dark mirror of Batman's.



THE BRONZE AGE
WATCHMEN



Inside the tumultuous world of Watchmen's development

SEEING THE ST

2009's *Watchmen* did the impossible by not only filming the 'unfilmable', but showing just how faithful to the source a superhero movie could be. We chart the classic comic's long journey to the big screen...

RINGS



Terry Gilliam, Darren Aronofsky, David Hayter, Paul Greengrass and Zack Snyder. There are very few films that have had such an impressive list of directors attached during its development. But there have been very

few films like *Watchmen*. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' postmodern, deconstructionalist look at superheroes, originally published by DC as a 12-part series back in 1985, has had a more chequered history than most in getting to the big screen. The comic series was one of the most inter-textual ever released by a mainstream comic book publisher, but that didn't stop Lawrence Gordon Productions picking up the film rights way back in 1986 for 20th Century Fox. The studio got Joel Silver, who went on to become a genre staple producing the *Lethal Weapon* films, *The Matrix* and *V For Vendetta*. The film company asked Moore to turn in a draft of the script, and when he refused, the studio brought screenwriter Sam Hamm in to do it. Hamm went on to write the two Tim Burton *Batman* movies and he condensed the bearded Northamptoner's plot into a 128-page script, complete with a more filmable ending. However, Fox changed its mind and the project was never made.

Enter Warner Brothers, DC's parent company, who took up the mantle after Fox. Warner decided to bring in ex-Python Terry Gilliam and Silver, who had been attached to the Fox version, to try and resuscitate it. Gilliam was unhappy with Hamm's take on the characters, and so he asked his collaborator Charles McKeown to develop a new draft of the script. Apparently, this draft of the script, which was credited to Gilliam, Warren Skaaren and Hamm, used Rorschach's diary as a voiceover and Silver was interested at the time in casting Hollywood action star Arnold Schwarzenegger as Dr Manhattan, according to its artist Dave Gibbons, and only raised \$25 million of the \$100 million budget. Gilliam's name was attached for a while and after it all fell apart, he sounded a little regretful that his involvement amounted to nothing.

"What happened was Joel Silver came along and convinced me there was this 'go' project, and they had a huge budget and all that stuff, and I like *Watchmen* a lot; I think it's really good. And so I got caught up in that thing, and I was actually terrified of it because it was going to be one more monstrous project. But we went along with it. It was weird, because I was sort of propelled forward because it was subject matter I liked a lot, and I knew I could do it, I recognised that I was about the only person who could do it well, and then I didn't get the money. So I was 'saved' from that one.

"However, I was contacted by the new owner of the rights in January [1996], wanting to know if I was still interested. I think it's going to be impossible to make as a film, unless you make it three and a half hours long, which most people aren't going to want," said Gilliam.



Can *Watchmen* possibly live up to the hype and expectation? It's not long until we find out.

THE PUPPET MASTERS

The long list of Watchmen directors



"Reducing [the story] to a two or two-and-a-half hour film seemed to me to take away the

essence of what *Watchmen* is about. I didn't want to get involved in another project that seemed destined for big money problems right from the start." —

Terry Gilliam



"I think this will translate very well to film. Like the book, people should be able to watch

the film six or seven times and get something different from it each time." — **David Hayter**



"I was on *Watchmen* for a week. I was literally on it for a week. I had very little to do with the project." —

Darren Aronofsky



"What you have to do is take that chronology as it's given to us in *Watchmen* and

try to update it. You don't replace it; you just say, 'What would have happened if that chronology continued?... I [also] think it's absolutely part of our purpose that we strive very, very hard to carry that [fan] community with us on our journey.' — **Paul Greengrass**



"I think what Alan Moore has, in his book, the comic he's made about authority

and government and all those things, they're big themes. Maybe if you make that movie right, [then] what that has to say makes people think about what's happening maybe now or in their own lives. That's my hope for what the movie can be." — **Zack Snyder**

Additional sources: Empire, Suicide Girls, IGN, Hollywood Reporter, First Showing.

Memorable and controversial, *Watchmen* was always going to be a tough project.

Once Gilliam left, producer Lawrence Gordon reacquired the rights and he asked Gilliam to reconsider, an offer that the director refused because he thought it would be better suited as a television miniseries. It took until the end of 2001 for Gordon, with Universal Studios, to get another helmer to take it on. This time it was David Hayter, who went on to write *X2* and *The Scorpion King*, and he was pencilled in to write it but also to direct for a reported seven-figure sum. When he was announced, he seemed very ebullient about the project to IGN: "Alan Moore's *Watchmen* presents one of the most brilliantly plotted, exciting and original stories to ever grace the pages of a comic-book, novel or any other genre. It is my goal to realise that on film and to retain the relationships between what is being said and the images presented. In the graphic novel, everything you see and hear is interconnected on many, many different levels."

He went on to share what he thought was the key to making it in an interview with *Comics Continuum*: "I believe I have found a way to do it. It's certainly not easy. It's a very complex story, very dense, very literate. I sat down and broke down the story points into their main components, and in that structure, I was able to find a way to present it in a two-hour format."

Hayter completed the first draft of the *Watchmen* script back in July 2002 and a year later, claimed that he had Alan Moore's blessing for the film, even though Moore has stated publicly since the start that he wants nothing to do with the film version of *Watchmen*. But by the end of that year, Hayter had fallen to the curse of *Watchmen* and parted company with Gordon and Universal. At the time, producers Gordon and Levin had made noises about bringing Hayter's *Watchmen* to Prague, where *Hellboy* was filmed (which they produced) but it all fell to pieces, leaving Moore and Gibbons' creation in limbo once again.

The project moved studios from Universal to Paramount, where Darren Aronofsky, who had directed the award-winning



With so many passionate fans, *Watchmen* was always going to be hard to realise on screen.



Every *Watchmen* character has been faithfully adapted for the movie.

independent film *Pi*, was brought in to direct Hayter's script. *Watchmen* isn't the only comic movie project Aronofsky's name has been affiliated with; at one point his name was mooted for *Batman: Year One*, with Frank Miller attached back in the late Nineties. But he wasn't with the project long, as he got caught up trying to make *The Fountain* and so dropped out. He spilt the beans about his brief participation through an interview with *Suicide Girls*: "I got involved and I got that setup at Paramount and then they fired me. Well they didn't fire me, but they wanted to go now. They wanted to be in pre-production in January and I've been working on [*The Fountain*] for six years and I clearly have a hard time doing two things at once. As soon as we set up, they got really excited and wanted it in the summer of '06 and I was like, 'This isn't a film you can rush because if you fuck it up there's going to be a lot of angry people.' The funny thing is that when I went to meet Bowie, one of the first things he said was, 'Oh, are you doing *Watchmen*?' It turned out that he was developing an opera out of *Watchmen*. I was like, 'If I do this film and I fuck it up, I'm going to piss David Bowie off.' The reason that I got involved is because David Hayter's script and I thought that it was a great adaptation. I thought that it was better than any of the Sam Hamm scripts. I wish them all the best luck but I can't do it that quick. I have to take my time."

Now it was time for Paul Greengrass to have a shot, a British TV director who is now best known for *The Bourne Supremacy*, *The Bourne Ultimatum* and this year's *Green Zone*. He had some intelligent things to say about the project even though, like

"Watchmen presents one of the most original and exciting stories to grace the pages of a comic book"

—David Hayter

Crudup was the actor that finally fit the bill for the role of Dr Manhattan.

Gilliam, Hayter and Aronofsky, his version was doomed. "I think one of the main things that makes *Watchmen* very special is that it's *WatchMEN*. It's not Spider-MAN. It's not BatMAN. It's not SuperMAN. It's *WatchMEN*. It's this ensemble of compelling characters with human depth and yet archetypal definition... that's the genius, I think, of the piece. I don't have a favourite character; they're all magnificent characters. And they all must have their moment in this film." But Greengrass's departure was hastened by a change in regime at Paramount, with its new CEO

Brad Grey, deciding to cut the project loose. At the end of 2005, Gordon and Levin negotiated with Warner Brothers and in June 2006, impressed with his work on adapting Frank Miller's *300* to the screen, Warner announced that its director Zack Snyder would be the one to bring Moore and Gibbons' creation to the cinema. As expected, Snyder sounded excited when he talked about it to *Empire* back in 2006: "We're getting ready to turn a script that we like into this studio," said Snyder. "They're pretty excited about it... I think the script that Alex (Tse) has done for us is the closest to the graphic novel it's been [since development started], for better or for worse. I feel like Alex has done an awesome job. It's keeping all the things that are cool about the comic." Dave Gibbons was even involved in the concept work and, in an interview with *Wizard* in the summer of 2008, publicly supported Snyder's efforts: "Having had some conversations with Zack Snyder, I'm bowled over by his enthusiasm. I suppose the basic question is: is a *Watchmen* movie a good idea? That's an imponderable question, but I do think Zack has got the ability to make a really good movie, and I think *Watchmen* has the ability to be a really good movie, and hopefully the two things will come together. Realistically speaking, I think it's a good script. Anything that's a movie version of a comic book, there's going to be compromise. I'm optimistic about it, and obviously I wish it well."

"There can't be a sequel or a prequel. Not with me involved... That's crazy talk"

— Zack Snyder

Of course, a large shadow was cast over the release of *Watchmen* with a lawsuit issued in 2008, which argued that 20th Century Fox still owned the rights to the property. But after several months of fraught back and forth in the courts,

on 15 January 2009, the matter was resolved, with Fox receiving a sizeable cash payment as well as gross participation in the film and any spin-offs or sequels. So, more than 20 years after it was first optioned, *Watchmen* will be released on 6 March. But if there's a sequel, it won't be directed by an adamant Zack Snyder: "That would be interesting. But there can't be a sequel. There can't be a prequel. Not with me involved. They might be able to find someone that would do it, but it wouldn't be me. That's crazy talk." Snyder has beaten the curse of *Watchmen* and one of modern comic's most difficult projects was finally seen on the big screen. ☞

Watchmen Director's Cut is out now on DVD and Blu-ray.



MARIONETTES

The proposed Charlton *Watchmen*

Watchmen began life as a series featuring characters from one of DC's former rival companies, Charlton, a short-lived publisher, updated for a modern audience. Comic history could have been so different if it had featured the Charlton characters...

Captain Atom

(Doctor Manhattan)

Air force pilot Nathaniel Adam (or scientist Allen Adam in the original Charlton series) was trapped in a military experiment that gave him superhuman strength, as well as the ability to fly and to shoot energy blasts from his hands.



Blue Beetle

(Nite Owl)

Dan Garrett was an archaeologist who discovered a magical Egyptian artefact that looked like a scarab and helped him to fight crime. Charlton replaced Garrett with Ted Kord, a student of his who replaced him as Blue Beetle when Garrett was killed off.



Thunderbolt

(Ozymandias)

Peter Cannon, orphaned son of American medics, was raised by Himalayan mystics and given his special powers from magical scrolls bequeathed to him by his teachers. He returned to the US with his friend Tabu to fight crime as Thunderbolt.



The Question

(Rorschach)

Investigative journalist Vic Sage encounters scientist Aristotle Rodor, who offers him his dangerous experimental artificial skin to use to expose Rodor's unsavoury compatriot Dr Twain. The skin obscures Sage's features, making him anonymous. The Question was created by Steve Ditko, who co-created Spider-Man with Stan Lee back in 1963 for Marvel.



Peacemaker

(The Comedian)

Peacemaker is Christopher Smith, a diplomat who is so obsessed with creating peace that he is willing to use force to get it. Most of his adversaries were dictators and warlords. He has no special powers and he learns that his obsession is related to the ignominy of having a father who was a commandant in a Nazi concentration camp.



Nightshade

(Silk Spectre)

Eve Eden is the daughter of a US senator and she got her powers, the ability to turn herself into a two-dimensional shadow, from her mother, who is a visitor from another dimension.





A TIME

TO KICK

For mainstream movie-goers, *Kick-Ass* seemed to come out of nowhere, but comic geeks long knew that something truly special was coming to kick the superhero movie right in the C-bomb. We went behind the scenes to find out how Mark Millar and John Romita Jr's foul-mouthed miniseries became 2010's coolest movie...

As far as alternative comic book movies go, *Kick-Ass* ticks all the boxes: it's set in a real-life locale, contains visceral violence and centres on individuals without any real powers. Based on creator Mark Millar and illustrator John Romita Jr's sleeper comic success, *Kick-Ass* has finally made the trip to screens. It's been a long wait, and despite the accessible subject matter, it hasn't always been a smooth ride. When SciFiNow catches up with Millar he is in a contemplative mood about *Kick-Ass*. "It's a very unusual situation: a screenplay is sent out to the studios and overnight everyone rejects it," he states bluntly. "Inside 24 hours they all said 'No way! It's a disaster.' So Matthew [Vaughn] raised \$40 million and made the film anyway – it could have been the most expensive home movie ever! ...For me it was wildly exciting, but for Vaughn it could have been life-changingly bad."

"Hollywood has a law of its own," Vaughn interjects, clearly a little indifferent about the varying attitudes studios had towards his superhero script. "The day you understand the law is the day you can retire. They didn't like the little girl or the swearing or the violence, but when they saw the film they were all: 'Oh my god we want to buy this, but do you have any more of the girl?'"

Obviously a studio did pick up the movie, and Millar was keen to address the issue of creative freedom during the production stages: "Why would we want to go from having complete freedom to people breathing down our neck?" he challenges. "The last Superman film had a bunch of executives who saw Superman in bed at the end of the film and thought, 'This a great idea,' and I never want to deal with people like that. I think it's best to be like George Lucas and live outside the system." Thankfully, this freedom to create a project situated somewhere out in the left field has proved fruitful, and just from glancing at the poster art alone you can tell that *Kick-Ass* is a film that is tightly bound to its comic source.

From chatting with Millar, Vaughn and Romita Jr you get a real sense of comradeship: they all retained the same vision and have worked in unison in order to get it realised on the big screen. Romita Jr, acting as official historian on this project, talks us through how this meeting of minds occurred: "From the beginning Mark included me in all of the steps so I was able to read the screenplay and watch the filming," he says, describing an animated scene in the movie. "They had me design some things and asked for my advice on others but it was Matthew's idea to have an homage to the comic with this short animated sequence and to have me 'direct' it. He kept it in my realm by not making it live-action, which was perfect."

Following this discussion on his part in the making of *Kick-Ass*, Romita Jr goes on to talk about how the rest of the crew got together: "Mark ran into Matthew at a social function when he was in



Kick-Ass is filled with swearing and ultra-violence.



Hit-Girl: a point of controversy from early on, she is nevertheless immensely entertaining.



KICK-ASS

between projects, and Mark said he had this idea. Matthew listened, then we started showing him some of the illustrations and it ran from there," he finishes. "When I heard [Vaughn] was working on the *Kick-Ass* project I went out and got all his films," Romita Jr adds. "I had seen *Stardust* but not *Layer Cake* but I am now a huge fan of the London gangster film, I love the visuals and the storytelling." Taking the baton, Millar explains how he got involved with the script-writing process: "I had written the first couple of issues of the comic and Matthew loved them and wanted more," he says. "So I sent him issues three and four and said I had written most of issue six – originally issue six was issue one and I was going to start it with Big Daddy and Hit-Girl – and the plot for issues five, seven and eight. I sent this down and he said, 'Do you mind if I start writing the screenplay?' He wrote a rough draft that I loved and then we made some changes and then took it to Jane [Goldman] who wrote a beautiful, more mainstream version with a cracking vulnerability to it." This kind of approach, where a multitude of creative individuals have lent their hand during the film's conception, is perfectly in

tune with the shifts in tone evident when watching the finished product.

In fact, this production was such a pleasant experience that Romita Jr himself lets slip that he is now interested in stepping behind the camera to shoot a feature film: "Because of *Kick-Ass* and the animated sequence I have been asked to direct a short live action film," Romita Jr informs, before going into plot details. "It's about a 100-year-old African American woman from Harlem who gets mugged and finds out that she has some latent powers and then goes frying all of the muggers in the city," he informs us, clearly relishing the prospect of this new project.

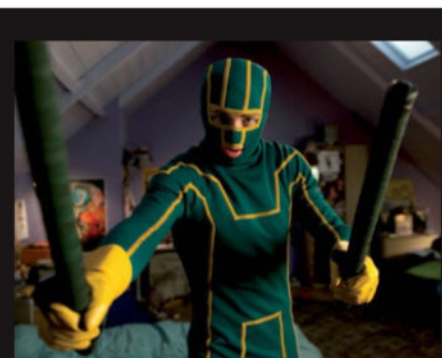


With the script in check, and everyone "so on the same page" (a neat way in which Millar describes his and Vaughn's idea process), the film was ready to shoot. In Vaughn, *Kick-Ass* had a director that was finally ready to make something vibrant and fun. *X-Men: The Last Stand* was where Vaughn was originally set to make his mark on the genre, but due to personal reasons this was not to be. Now, he is clearly ready to make an altogether different type of Marvel movie.

Speaking about his fresh and, let's face it, bloody approach to shooting the movie, Vaughn says: "I am bored of all the shaky cam, hand held, quick-cutting where you have no idea what's going on so I wanted to do something where you could see everything and enjoy it." He continues: "You knew ➤



"I AM BORED OF SHAKY CAM WHERE YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT'S GOING ON" – MATTHEW VAUGHN



COURTING CONTROVERSY

Explaining the reasons behind that infamous line

Back in January an uncensored cut of *Kick-Ass* was screened, and managed to ruffle a few feathers. The reason behind this furore was a certain line spouted by Hit-Girl – you know the one we are talking about. Speaking to *SciFiNow*, John Romita Jr and Matthew Vaughn were quick to dispel this negative attention. "All my career I have worked in mainstream, PG-rated comics," says Romita Jr. "But as soon as I got a chance to work with Mark [Millar] I decided I would rather work with Mark than be concerned with what parents think. And *Kick-Ass* had a rating and a publishing division that was R rated so people know what to expect," he states. "Most people understand that it is a character," Vaughn adds. "I had one argument with someone who said, 'It's disgusting, using the C word.' And I said, 'You're complaining that she swore but not that she killed 40 people,'" he ends. "As for the film, it is a controversial subject matter but there have been many films with controversial content that are critically acclaimed," reasons Romita Jr before hammering the point home. "To get critical acclaim and commercial success is tough, but I think they've done it."

"I LOVE THAT KICK-ASS IS A BRITISH FILM... IF YOU ARE CLEVER AND DON'T WASTE YOUR MONEY ON CGI THEN BRITAIN CAN DO SUPERHERO MOVIES"

— Mark Millar

who was fighting who and where they were in the room. That was my goal while trying to make it as fast paced and interesting as possible."

On the subject of casting, Vaughn had a clear aim when he set out to make this picture. "I wanted to have Nicolas Cage because he is a big comic-book fan. I wanted people around me that embraced the idea of reinventing the superhero film." In the case of lead Aaron Johnson, it wasn't so clear-cut: "He was literally the last person we saw," Vaughn reveals. "I was about to push the movie back six months because I hadn't found anyone to play Dave. Casting Hit-Girl was relatively easy, though; she was one of the first. I thought it would be difficult finding a girl of that age that can do what the character needs to do, but two weeks later we've found Chloë [Moretz] and she was off training and three months after that we were still struggling to find Kick-Ass." Piping in with a choice anecdote, Romita Jr praises how the mostly British cast got to grips with a New York accent: "Mark [Strong] does a great accent as the tough guy. It seems that Brits have this ability to imitate the American accent really well. The only thing is they didn't have me as a true, died-in-the-wool New Yorker. I am in the background as an extra in one scene, though, and I have a move – I turn the TV louder," he humorously concludes. "I have an important moment."

Millar is also extremely proud of the identity of *Kick-Ass*, and remains confident that this film was quite unique in its placing. "I love that this is a British film," he exclaims. "Because when I went to see *Unbreakable* a few years ago I thought, 'How come Channel Four doesn't do a film like that?' They can't use the budget excuse; they are just limited by their imagination, because *Kick-Ass* cost less than *The Boat That Rocked*. If you are clever and don't waste your money on CGI then Britain can do superhero movies. And that was our plan – to make a Brit superhero film! No matter how big it is, we won't be up for a fuckin' BAFTA!"



Kick-Ass affectionately sends up superhero tropes.



The fight scenes in *Kick-Ass* strike a good balance between violent and funny.



When he's not fighting crime, Kick-Ass likes to nerd out with his pals.

But we are on the cusp of a new generation of British filmmakers who want to do movies about zombies not teenage runaways," he jests before giving some clarity with regards to his feelings. "28 Days Later means a lot more to me than any Ken Loach movie."



In an age where Spider-Man, Batman and Iron Man have proved their might in pulling in the crowds, it's safe to say that *Kick-Ass*, an underdog superhero flick in every sense of the word, has arrived during something of a golden era for the genre. Vaughn, however, isn't so forgiving and sees many missed opportunities. "I think they were getting stuck in a rut. Robert Downey Jr did something different with Iron Man and everyone embraced it, so Hollywood realised that people do want something different. But the problem with *Watchmen* was that it was a movie that should have been made 20 years ago. For 18-year-olds, Nixon and the Cold War are pretty irrelevant." This opinion is evident when watching *Kick-Ass*, a movie that is so against the grain that it makes even the grittier moments of *The Dark Knight* look rosy. Amid all the chaos and splatter-

happy violence, *Kick-Ass* still manages to retain a sense of fun, albeit in more of an adult sense. It's this mix that, in all hope, will get the superhero genre out of this bind, and with Vaughn calling the shots this is just the type of kick to the head the genre needs.

When posed with that pivotal question on just why *Kick-Ass* has achieved such widespread popularity, Millar gave a considered response: "My theory is there has been a gap in the market for a new generation of superhero films for 20 plus years," he theorises. "In the Golden Age of comics, all these characters came along but you ended up having writers who were readers primarily – they grew up with Spider-Man and wanted to write Spider-Man. I interviewed Stan Lee twice and he said if he had written the stuff he grew up with he would have never have done Marvel and I remember thinking, 'Wouldn't it be nice to create this generation's group of heroes.' It should have happened in the Nineties but didn't so the reason



Wanted, *Kick-Ass* and *War Heroes* got picked up so quickly was because there is nothing else there."

Kick-Ass is out now on DVD and Blu-ray.



MILLAR AT THE MOVIES



He may dub working in Hollywood as nothing but a fun hobby, but even prior to his hit with *Kick-Ass*, Mark Millar has more than proved his worth on some major big-screen projects...



IRON MAN

Despite not having a writing credit on this movie per se, director Jon Favreau does cite Millar as being the man behind the decision not to include popular villain the Mandarin in favour of Iron Monger.



WANTED

Loosely based on Millar's limited comic book series of the same name, *Wanted* is an ultra-violent foray into the world of super assassins. Unlike Millar's much darker comic, this film took a much more self-righteous approach.



KICK-ASS

This featured comic series exceeded all expectations and has gone on to sell more than *Spider-Man* and *X-Men*. With Matthew Vaughn at the helm, this brainchild of Millar's has been crafted into a brutal treat of a movie.



CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE FIRST AVENGER & AVENGERS ASSEMBLE

When Millar and artist Bryan Hitch set about making their seminal comic series, *The Ultimates*, none could have anticipated how integral this venture would be to Marvel Studios' current output. *Captain America: The First Avenger* lifted its prologue wholesale from seminal series.

"I THINK SUPERHERO MOVIES WERE GETTING STUCK IN A RUT" – MARK MILLAR

2008
to 2014

THE MODERN AGE OF SUPERHERO MOVIES

The modern age of superhero movies was ushered in with Josh Whedon's *Avenger's Assemble* in 2012, the culmination of everything set in motion since *Iron Man* in 2008. DC and Marvel have sent their cinematic universes into the stratosphere with their superhero team ups and we can only dream of the heights our genre will reach in the future

FEATURED: PAGE 128 AVENGERS ASSEMBLE

DIRECTOR: Joss Whedon
CAST: Robert Downey Jr, Chris Evans
RELEASED: 4 May 2012

- *Avengers Assemble* is big, but not bloated. It doesn't feel like it's two hours long, as energy levels are ramped up and remain. There's an amazing economy of dialogue and motion, with every line or gesture intended to bring us joy.

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

DIRECTOR: Marc Webb
CAST: Andrew Garfield, Emma Stone
RELEASED: 3 July 2012

- Patriotic parades and daytime adventures are traded for back-alley brawls and gunfire. A brilliant reimagining of everybody's favourite web-slinger.

VERDICT ★★★★★



DAWN OF JUSTICE

THE DARK KNIGHT RISES

DIRECTOR: Christopher Nolan
CAST: Christian Bale, Tom Hardy
RELEASED: 20 July 2012

- It's not just the allusions to *The Dark Knight Returns* that give Nolan's operatic final chapter a touch of Frank Miller; it's the ugly libertarian power fantasies in which Occupy Wall Street becomes a shortcut to Stalin's Purges.

VERDICT ★★★★★

DREDD

DIRECTOR: Peter Travis
CAST: Karl Urban, Lean Headey
RELEASED: 12 September 2012

- Alex Garland and Peter Travis silenced all critics with a raw and uncompromisingly violent take on the trigger-happy 2000 AD antihero, and its less than stellar takings belie – like *Blade Runner* before it – cult status.

VERDICT ★★★★★

IRON MAN 3

DIRECTOR: Shane Black
CAST: Robert Downey Jr, Gwyneth Paltrow
RELEASED: 3 May 2013

- Behind the special effects fireworks and superb action on display, there's a real story at its heart that you could accuse *Avenger Assemble* of lacking.

VERDICT ★★★★★

FEATURED: PAGE 134 MAN OF STEEL

DIRECTOR: Zack Snyder
CAST: Henry Cavill, Amy Adams
RELEASED: 14 June 2013

- Just as the symbol on Kal-El's chest stands for hope, *Man Of Steel* represents the hope for this rebooted franchise. It's a modern Superman story carving its own path free of the shackles of nostalgia.

VERDICT ★★★★★

THE WOLVERINE

DIRECTOR: James Mangold
CAST: Hugh Jackman, Will Yun Lee
RELEASED: 26 July 2013

- Like one of its fight scenes, *The Wolverine* manages the delicate balance of respect for the source, big top sensation, and an unlikely, heart-wrenching emotional punch.

VERDICT ★★★★★

KICK-ASS 2

DIRECTOR: Jeff Wadlow
CAST: Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Chloë Grace Moretz
RELEASED: 16 August 2013

- *Kick-Ass 2* delivers a lot of laughs, the performances are still good, and it's ambitious, but the constant attempts to compensate for steering too far in one direction don't end well.

VERDICT ★★★★★

THOR: THE DARK WORLD

DIRECTOR: Alan Taylor
CAST: Chris Hemsworth, Tom Hiddleston
RELEASED: 8 November 2013

- It might be hurried and it might occasionally be a bit silly, but *The Dark World* has a real emotional core to it, and an ever-strengthening identity and mythology of its own.

VERDICT ★★★★★



MAN OF STEEL





AVENGERS ASSEMBLE

THE FANTASTIC FOUR

DIRECTOR: Josh Trank
CAST: Kate Mara, Miles Teller, Jamie Bell
RELEASED: 6 August 2015
 ● Chronicle director Josh Trank misjudged Marvel's first family, taking them into space but not completely delivering on his promises.
VERDICT ★★☆☆

FEATURED: PAGE 156
ANT-MAN

DIRECTOR: Edgar Wright
CAST: Paul Rudd, Michael Douglas
RELEASED: 17 July 2015
 ● After Edgar Wright left the project, concerns reared their heads, but to no avail as *Ant-Man* delivered so spectacularly we don't know what on Earth we were worried about in the first place!
VERDICT ★★★★★

FEATURED: PAGE 162
DEADPOOL

DIRECTOR: Tim Miller
CAST: Ryan Reynolds
RELEASED: 12 February 2016
 ● When the test footage got leaked, the world went mad, and the powers that be listened. They really listened. Because the trailer was absolute gold. Deadpool, the meta superhero, swearing, shooting, drawing. It's all amazing.
VERDICT ★★★★★

FEATURED: PAGE 168
BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE

DIRECTOR: Zack Snyder
CAST: Henry Cavill, Ben Affleck
RELEASED: 25 March 2016
 ● The more we find out the less we know about Warner's *Man Of Steel* sequel, which promises to crib from *The Dark Knight Returns* while setting up Wonder Woman and Cyborg for a *Justice League* movie.
EXCITEMENT ★★★★★

ANT-MAN



DEADPOOL



GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER

DIRECTORS: Anthony & Joe Russo
CAST: Chris Evans, Scarlett Johansson
RELEASED: 4 April 2014
 ● By keeping Cap and his journey the focal point, *The Winter Soldier* remains a gripping, exciting and surprisingly tough film that uses current concerns to remind us of the character's strengths.
VERDICT ★★★★★

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 2

DIRECTOR: Marc Webb
CAST: Andrew Garfield, Emma Stone
RELEASED: 2 May 2014
 ● From the slow-mo showdowns in Times Square to the script that's loaded with Stan Lee-style zingers, it's as if someone's switched on the light after summers of 'dark and gritty' superhero flicks.
VERDICT ★★★★★

FEATURED: PAGE 140
X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

DIRECTOR: Bryan Singer
CAST: Patrick Stewart, James McAvoy
RELEASED: 22 May 2014
 ● Reconciling the *First Class* and *Last Stand* casts is part of what makes *Days Of Future Past* one of the most ambitious superhero films to date. **VERDICT** ★★★★★

FEATURED: PAGE 148
GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

DIRECTOR: James Gunn
CAST: Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldana
RELEASED: 1 August 2014
 ● We thought Marvel was going slightly mad when they first toted *Guardians Of The Galaxy* as their next big hit. How could a relatively unknown bunch of misfits work in a film series as successful as the MCU? As it turned out, it was a blinder. And who knew the friendship between a racoon and a walking tree would make us weep.
VERDICT ★★★★★

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

DIRECTOR: Jonathan Liebesman
CAST: Megan Fox, Will Arnett
RELEASED: 17 October 2014
 ● The first trailer promised a potentially disastrous mix of slapstick and grittiness. It didn't fare well.
VERDICT ★★☆☆

BIRDMAN

DIRECTOR: Alejandro González Iñárritu
CAST: Michael Keaton, Emma Stone
RELEASED: 1 January 2015
 ● Oscar winning and rightfully so. *Birdman* is a film with heart that brings a new meaning to the term 'superhero'.
VERDICT ★★★★★

AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON

DIRECTOR: Joss Whedon
CAST: Robert Downey Jr, Chris Evans
RELEASED: 24 April 2015
 ● The Avengers reassembled with some new friends to take on a new enemy: Ultron. *Avengers Assemble* may have built them up, but Whedon tore them down again in style.
VERDICT ★★★★★

**"IT IS A REALLY GOOD STORY
THAT COULD HAVE
BEEN DONE WRONG A
HUNDRED WAYS"**

ROBERT DOWNEY JR

ASSEMBLING EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES

AFTER FOUR YEARS AND FIVE MOVIES, MARVEL FINALLY BROUGHT THE AVENGERS TOGETHER ON THE BIG SCREEN FOR THE GAME-CHANGING SUPERHERO CINEMA EVENT OF 2012. WE JOINED DIRECTOR JOSS WHEDON, AND ACTORS CHRIS HEMSWORTH, ROBERT DOWNEY JR., CHRIS EVANS, JEREMY RENNER, SCARLETT JOHANSSON AND MARK RUFFALO ON SET IN NEW MEXICO...



s **SciFiNow** pulls into the dusty car park of Albuquerque Studios in the middle of the arid desert of New Mexico, it is noticeable that the space closest to the front doors is allocated to a certain ‘T. Stark’. Next to that is ‘J. Whedon’, one space further away. An in-joke, or an intriguing insight into how the set of *The Avengers* – or *Avengers Assemble* as it has been rebadged in the UK – is being run?

Security is incredibly high. Various forms of identification have been checked and checked again, and many questions asked, driving us insane with anticipation before we are finally let into the main building, which houses the production offices and is temporarily home to Marvel Studios during the studio portion of filming *Avengers Assemble*. As we step into a lift in the lobby, we are suddenly faced by the intimidating figure of Chris Hemsworth, casually dressed in a T-shirt and shorts, but looking every inch the Norse god; his impressive bulk takes up half the lift, despite four other people being in there with him. His deep laugh resonates in the confined space as he is asked where he has been. “The gym,” is his simple reply. You can tell.

Before we have the chance to get our bearings, we sit down with the giant Australian. Last time we saw Thor, he was trapped in Asgard with the Bifrost – the bridge linking Thor’s kingdom to other dimensions and worlds – broken and shattered. So where is he at the start of *Avengers Assemble*?

“Thor has returned to Earth,” says Hemsworth, “because his brother is involved in the chaos which is happening, so there is some family business to take care of.”

He is allowed to say little about specific plot points – a studio exec is on hand to foil our enquiries – but can confirm that there is much friction between the hastily thrown-together team, and the major thorn in their side is Thor’s aforementioned brother, Loki.

“THERE’S NOT TIME FOR ROMANCE, WE’VE GOT SHIT TO AVENGE”
SCARLETT JOHANSSON

“There’s definitely brotherly stuff, which has been nice to play with. Thor has a different angle, which might be against the attitude of, ‘Let’s just go and kill him.’ Thor is like, ‘Wait a second... I’ll do that. It’s my brother,’ so there’s an interesting dynamic.”

Despite being prohibited to reveal secrets, we ask Hemsworth what that first day shooting with all the Avengers was like. “That was a trippy set to walk onto,” confirms the Aussie actor. “Meeting these people for the first time in full costume, Iron Man and Captain America, was exciting!”

Before we explore the sets, we are joined by Tom Hiddleston. The English actor reprised his role as Loki, who will be raining chaos down on the Avengers. Hiddleston is in no doubt as to why he is the perfect villain for Marvel’s first assembly of the Avengers.

“Somewhere in Loki’s credentials as a bad guy, he is a damaged soul searching for the answers to why he exists and what his role is in this universe. He isn’t just evil just for the sake of being evil. Each of the Avengers have their own individual pain. Loki, too, has his own pain, and somehow by bringing them all together their pain is eased by being part of a team, which is a unique selling point to this film.”

THE TALL HIDDLESTON, TWIDDLING HIS FINGERS, ALSO ASSURES US THAT LOKI HAS GROWN UP SINCE HIS

brilliantly nuanced performance as the petulant little brother in *Thor*. He now “understands his own power, understands his own anger and is able to suppress it. He is more mischievous. Loki is the god of mischief, and his actions are very, very difficult for the Avengers to pin down.”

Finally, the tortuous wait is over and we are walked onto Stage 8, a huge hanger which houses one of the colossal Helicarrier sets for the film. This is the control room, where the cast, accompanied by 75 extras, has been shooting for two weeks. In the centre is a staircase, rising to meet a huge SHIELD logo. At the base sits a massive glass table, around which the Avengers first sit to hear Nick Fury’s call to action, and discuss how to deal with the imminent humanity-threatening invasion.

As we then make our way across the studio lot, there are telltale signs of just how big a production this is. Dozens of trailers fill every yard of space, along with vehicles and army trucks emblazoned with the SHIELD emblem.

Stage 6 holds another Helicarrier interior set, which hints at what may play out. A lab –



GODLINESS	96
SERIOUS MAN CRUSH	82
ARM GIRTH	94
HAMMERTIME	91

Now the rightful champion of Asgard, thunder god Thor booted his brother out of the Norse realm and down to Earth, where he’s been causing maximum mischief. Can a god fit in with this ragtag group of strong men and women?

READ THIS | *THOR* BY KIERON GILLEN – *ULTIMATE COLLECTION* (WRITER: KIERON GILLEN, ARTIST: VARIOUS)



RAGE, IN GENERAL	100
RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS	77
REPLACING ED NORTON	92
SMILING IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY	11

An angry man and the result of an experiment gone wrong, Bruce Banner turns into the Hulk when he gets his rage on. The most unknown quantity of the group, everyone is unsure whether he will be able to control his powers.

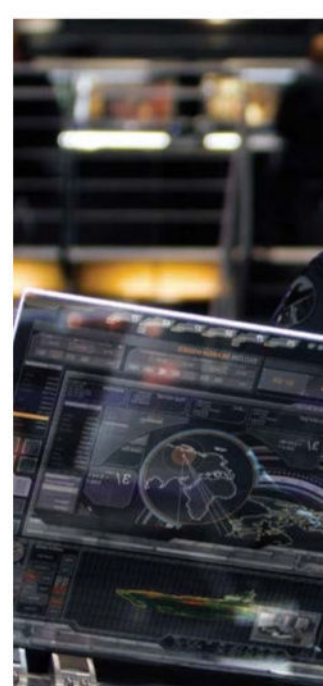
READ THIS | *THE HULK*: GREY (WRITER: JEPH LOEB, ARTIST: TIM SALE)



ACCURACY	100
SEXUAL TENSION WITH BLACK WIDOW	66
CAMEOING IN OTHER MOVIES	71
ATTENDANCE	65

Yes, Hawkeye is a man with a bow and arrow, but damn it, he is accurate. Clint Barton is a long-time SHIELD veteran in league with Nick Fury. His contribution to the team will be a form of weaponry outdated as of the 15th Century.

READ THIS | *THE ULTIMATES VOLUME 2: HOMELAND SECURITY* (WRITER: MARK MILLAR, ARTIST: BRYAN HITCH)





For the first time, Thor (Chris Hemsworth) and Captain America (Chris Evans) come together on the big screen.

HERO SHOWDOWN

IRON MAN

SARCASM	85
SOBRIETY	4
TECHNOLOGY	100
MILD SEXISM	78

Billionaire playboy-turned-hostage Tony Stark forged his own advanced superhero suit before going off the rails. Having recently had a technological upgrade, he's ready to bark quips in the face of his fellow Avengers.

READ THIS

IRON MAN: EXTREMIS (WRITER: WARREN ELLIS, ARTIST: ADI GRANOV)



the Wishbone lab – is totally destroyed, as is a large circular isolation chamber. Is this where Dr Banner is held before he changes? Where Loki is imprisoned when he is first captured before escaping? (As it turned out, it is meant for both.) Apparently the lab is where Dr Banner does a lot of his work, but we are not told if it is the Hulk that has caused the devastation in front of us, the floor strewn with broken glass and bullets, with evidence of fire creeping up the walls.

When we reach the third Helicarrier stage, director Joss Whedon is in the midst of a scene with two of his stars, and there can be no doubt that it is the bearded helmer who is in charge on this set. Chris Evans, once again donning the stars and stripes of Steve Rogers, Captain America, and Robert Downey Jr, as Tony Stark, the arrogant alter-ego of Iron Man, are arguing about working for Nick Fury, and Stark is vacillating between anger and defiance. We watch six or seven takes, discovering that someone has died, that Fury “has blood on his hands,”

that “Loki is a full-tilt diva,” according to Stark, and that he wreaks havoc in Stuttgart at the beginning of the film. Interesting.

After Whedon is satisfied, he releases Evans and Downey Jr to come and chat with us. Stark’s ‘arc reactor’ is still glowing in Downey’s suit, prompting him to shout to the prop guys to switch off. The two stars banter like old friends. Both are adamant that Whedon has done an amazing job with the script and story.

“This is hugely ambitious,” enthuses Downey Jr. “It is a really good story that could have been done wrong a hundred ways. I’ll go out on a limb – you will be pleased and surprised at how not predictable it is.”

From a man who is notorious for tinkering with the script of whatever film he is working on, Downey Jr is so confident of the words that he assures us he hasn’t meddled at all, saying, “It wasn’t broke, so it’s not like we had to fix things.” It’s clear the that two actors get on, but

we doubt the brash Tony Stark and the anachronistic Steve Rogers fare as well working together. When asked about their relationship, Evans confirms the two heroes have difficulties.

“Tony is more flash. He’s got charisma oozing out of him, and he likes the spotlight. Cap might be more reserved in his desire to be front and centre,” says Evans, “But they are both, at their core, heroes. Even if Tony is flash and hot-shit, he is still a hero. He is still a good man. It just takes the duration of the film for them to see eye-to-eye and to see that in one another.”

IT’S DAY TWO, IT’S 105 DEGREES IN THE SHADE, AND SCIFINOW IS NOW STANDING, SWEATING, IN AN OLD, ABANDONED RAIL-YARD OUTSIDE ALBUQUERQUE. WE HAVE VENTURED THROUGH the desert to get here, following strange orange signs that simply say ‘Group Hug’, the amusing working title given to the project to throw off inquisitive fans.

"THIS BEING THE AVENGERS, WE NEED TO HAVE THREE OR FOUR SET-PIECES THAT ARE LIKE, 'HOLY SHIT!'"

KEVIN FEIGE

➤ As we walk into the vast metal skeleton of a building, we find ourselves confronted by huge green backdrops around a scene of utter carnage, including a dozen trashed New York taxicabs, quarter of a mile long, posing as a street outside Grand Central Station. This is the setting for today's crucial action set-piece.

On this sweltering faux New York street, we are lucky enough to be watching Jeremy Renner take on eight enemies – all clad in motion-capture suits – while a bus burns next to them. This adds to the oppressive heat, from which there is no respite; air-conditioning units create too much noise.

Renner works through take after take – seemingly oblivious to the elements as mere mortals are affected by – repelling endless waves of attacks, while his bored-looking stunt double chews his nails. Directing the *Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol* and soon-to-be *Bourne Legacy* star is second unit director, John Mahaffie, whose impressive CV includes working with Peter Jackson on *The Lord Of The Rings* trilogy. When we talk to Whedon later, he admits that this scale of movie-making is new to him, but he has every faith in his extended crew.

"When it's this big, you have to have a second unit, and I have enormous confidence in John, who is inventive, precise and caring. He and I will spend a lot of time talking about how I am shooting a scene and what I am looking for, so his stuff comes in seamlessly

and excitingly." Unfortunately, we are denied the sight of Scarlett Johansson fighting next to Renner, but the few glimpses of her wandering around on-set in her Black Widow costume reminds us there is more to *Avengers Assemble* than just the four male leads.

We grab Renner and Johansson for a quick chat, and the actress – now more comfortably dressed in a Mötley Crüe T-shirt and shorts – explains what she thinks Loki is up to.

"He has an agenda that the best way to break up a group is by trying to manipulate the situation by going individually to each one of our characters. It's like he's playing good cop/bad cop with each of us. He is trying to figure out a way to make holes in the team, to disassemble us in some way."

Hawkeye and Black Widow are the two team members who have to rely on nothing but their own skills. With no flying metal suit, super-serum, Mjolnir or an ability to turn into a rampaging green monster to fall back on, how do the 'normal' human Avengers cope?

"Initially I thought that was going to be weird," admits Renner, "but then I found out more about Hawkeye. I thought, 'What's a bow and arrow going to do against The Hulk?' Whereas actually – I can't tell you how – but I can put him down."

We press the Black Widow actress on how that first day on the bridge of the Helicarrier went down, when the whole cast was finally together, and she beams a huge smile.

"It was like dress up, but to the extreme where we can all beat the absolute shit out of each other. Even when the Avengers assemble, it feels totally like I'm a little kid. Everybody looks incredibly uncomfortable, but to the cameras we're all fucking badass."

We ask Johansson who she thinks has it worst as far as costumes go. "Everybody has their own uncomfortable costume, but it's like 800 degrees in mine. And it's a unitard and I have nothing underneath it."

Unable to shake that thought for some time, we escape the heat of the railway and head back to Albuquerque Studios for a meeting with the two main men, director Joss Whedon and Marvel über-lord Kevin Feige.

First, Feige takes us on a tour of the Art Department, and we see visuals from clearly integral parts of the movie, including the awesome spectacle of both the Helicarrier and the Quinjet in all their technological glory.

Feige also explains his view of the plot. "If SHIELD was this organisation that just stepped out of the shadows occasionally in other movies to see what was going on, in this movie we are through SHIELD's point of view.



NICK FURY

EYEPATCH	98
ORGANISATION	85
SAVING AMERICA	90
WEARING A NICE JACKET	88

The SHIELD overseer has worked his ass off to bring the Avengers together in order to battle an intergalactic force, but can he keep them together? Fury is in charge of the rather daunting operation to save Earth.

READ THIS | THE ULTIMATES VOLUME 1: SUPER-HUMAN (WRITER: MARK MILLAR, ARTIST: BRYAN HITCH)



Nick Fury: the man tasked with assembling the Avengers.



As a fan, *Avengers Assemble* is close to director Whedon's heart.

It's seeing what a day in the life of Nick Fury is like, as the head of this organisation. And when this event occurs, he is forced to take these people who he isn't really sure he can handle individually, and see if he can get them to work together to stop this grave threat. We are looking at it as a disaster movie."

CONSIDERING THE MASSIVE SUCCESS OF THE TWO IRON MAN MOVIES, THOR AND CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE FIRST AVENGER, FEIGE IS INCREDIBLY GROUNDED, TAKING

nothing for granted. However, he has a plan. "We have *Iron Man 3*," confirms Feige, "which will be the first of what we refer to as 'Phase Two' of this saga that will culminate, God willing, in *Avengers Assemble 2*. [As *Assemble* when on to become the third-highest grossing movie of all time, the sequel, *Age Of Ultron* soon-to-be-released.] We are thinking and plotting up until 2015."

Among all the dazzling images we see we see a few different imaginings of the Hulk, and Feige is adamant that he and Whedon can make a success of the not-so-jolly green giant in a way that previous incarnations have failed to do. "Joss' goal is to make the most beloved Bruce Banner since Bill Bixby."

As we return from the Art Department we stumble across Mark Ruffalo, the new Dr Bruce Banner/Hulk himself, just back from a camping trip with his son. He immediately offers to show us exclusive pics of the latest rendering of the Hulk that he has on his phone. A studio executive literally runs towards him, confiscating his mobile before damage can be done. Ruffalo simply laughs.

Left to his own devices, Ruffalo reveals that Dr Banner is not recruited to exploit his anger issues, but for his scientific brain.

"He ends up being an intricate component in the first part. They aren't after him necessarily to be the Hulk. They're after him because of his gamma expertise. There's a big portion in where he's helping them crack this riddle."

RUFFALO TAKES IMMENSE PRIDE IN BEING THE FIRST ACTOR TO PLAY BOTH BANNER AND THE HULK, AND WORKED EXTENSIVELY WITH

ILM to make the Hulk as 'Ruffalised' as possible. But however much fun he had, he didn't enjoy that first day on set as much as the other Avengers, lacking the iconic costumes they all owned.

"The first day I was a miserable bastard, I felt really uncomfortable. I'm not well-endowed," confesses Ruffalo, "and those mo-cap suits don't show you off! I was reduced to a Chinese chequer

board!" After this impromptu chat, Feige takes us into a surprisingly basic trailer where he has hidden his erstwhile director, and we find Mr Whedon, creator of *Buffy* and *Firefly*, fiddling with his cuffs waiting for us.

Once we get over the excitement of being in the same room as this legend, we question him as to how much he was left to his own devices in writing the plot.

"It started out with Kevin [Feige] and Jeremy [Latham, producer] telling me, 'We know the basic structure of how they come together, what works and what doesn't, and the climax,' which was nice as it gave me a basic skeleton of three acts to hang on."

Whedon is a self-confessed Avengers' obsessive, so what were his favourite moments from the comics, and could he fit them in? "The truly iconic stuff isn't in the film. It's part of the grand Marvel tradition to steal from all of the comics and all of the eras, but for me the Avengers exist mostly in my heart, because of the Jim Starlin's *Avengers Annual* with Thanos and Warlock, and *The Thing Two-In-One* that followed it. That defined why I love the Avengers more than anything. Obviously, that was a long time ago, but since then, the most important stuff – *Civil War*, *The Ultimates* – amped up the tension between the Avengers, and that's what makes it interesting to write, but when it comes to the iconic moments, you would have to take those things, distil them and find your own."

We are dying to know how Whedon can possibly create any sort of drama and raise the stakes when he is not allowed to kill off any of his major players because of not just one franchise, but four or five riding on it.

"It's a struggle. And ultimately the answer is that what's at stake has to be more than their lives. They have to be going through an internal struggle that matches what they are facing on the outside so that even if they survive, they may be compromised to a point where they can't recover. If you have that, you push them towards something that is frightening and unlikely, a real choice that they can't necessarily deal with."

For a last word on the film, which beat *The Dark Knight* in takings as the biggest comic-book movie ever we have to return to Scarlett Johansson, who when asked whether there might be the distraction of any potential love-match between Black Widow and Hawkeye, dismisses us out of hand. "There's no time for romance. We've got shit to avenge." ☛



Avengers: Age Of Ultron is in cinemas 23 April in the UK, while *Avengers Assemble* is out now on DVD, Blu-ray and 3D Blu-ray.



INAPPROPRIATE ATTIRE 90
MARTIAL ARTS 54
BRINGING A GUN TO BATTLE 87
DOUBLE-CROSSING 75

After infiltrating Stark Industries, spy Natasha Romanoff helped recruit Tony Stark to the Avengers cause. She's especially close to Hawkeye due to their shared history in espionage, cameos and lack of real superpowers.

READ THIS | *THE ULTIMATES VOLUME 6: SUPER-HUMAN* (WRITER: MARK MILLAR, ARTIST: BRYAN HITCH)



PATRIOTISM 100
SHIELD THROWING 95
NOSTALGIA 88
READY FOR WAR 94

Unfrozen from time, World War II hero Steve Rogers was transformed into Captain America via the super-soldier serum. Having woken up in present day New York, he's pissed that everyone he ever knew is either old or dead.

READ THIS | *ULTIMATE CAPTAIN AMERICA* (WRITER: JASON AARON, ARTIST: DON GARNEY)

SUPERMAN REBORN

MAN OF STEEL STAR HENRY CAVILL, DIRECTOR ZACK SNYDER
AND PRODUCER CHARLES ROVEN REVEALED HOW THEY BROUGHT
THE BIG BLUE BOY SCOUT BACK DOWN TO EARTH IN 2013...

Action Comics #1 in 1938 was the Big Bang of superheroes. Drawing on the pulp tradition of adventure serials, costumed crime-fighters and circus strongmen, in a single building-leaping bound Superman kickstarted the Golden Age of comic-books, and in 1978, with John Williams' pulse-pounding march at his back, the superhero movie.

Spring and summer end, though. The emblem of all that is good, pure, true and just is now an ironic punchline to a generation weaned on Peter Parker skipping class, Tony Stark pissing his peripherals or Bruce Wayne brooding in the dark. The S-shield might be the most recognisable logo since the golden arches, but Fast Food Origins: Ronald McDonald would pack out cinemas as well as Bryan Singer's subdued *Superman Returns* did in 2006.

With *Man Of Steel*, however, cinema's holy trinity of the strip-to-screen – director Zack Snyder, writer David S Goyer and producer Christopher Nolan – boldly declared that there have been no other Superman movies. This is a clean break, and it's worth remembering that *Batman Begins* crept into cult status coyly positioned as a prequel until success caught up and slyly birthed a new franchise. Incidentally, *Man Of Steel's* premise was worked up concurrently to production on the *The Dark Knight Rises* with Goyer and producer Charles Roven, while Nolan advised by phone with one hand and broke the Bat with the other.

"The previous versions are great films, but they are very much for that era, while this movie is for contemporary times," says star Henry Cavill. "Those movies were very much based in a pseudo-fantasy world – a very light world – but I think modern audiences need more of a base in reality to be able to associate with it and take stuff seriously."

SUPES' FIRST REALITY CHECK WILL BE MAKING SOME TOUGH CALLS, ACCORDING TO ROVEN. "SUPERMAN NEVER REALLY HAD TO MAKE A DECISION; HE ALWAYS KNEW WHAT WAS RIGHT OR WRONG. WE MIGHT ADMIRE HIM FOR THE FACT that he had great moral character, never wavered and never had any doubts about what he needed to do, but as great as somebody like that might be, he's not very realistic and he's a little bit unrelatable.

"[Nolan and Goyer's] desires were to bring that character into the 21st Century by giving him questions, decisions he had to make," Roven continues. "He's a guy who was a little bit unsure of what his purpose was in the world he was thrown into. Zack [Snyder] took that idea and really enhanced it, not only in his ideas of what to do with the script when he became involved, but how to realise those things in the execution of making a film. He came up with a way to make the film very naturalistic."

Essentially, *Man Of Steel* is a tale of first contact, imagining what it would be like if such an extraordinary man existed. There would be a front-page frenzy and police sirens blaring, much as they were in Grant Morrison's recent *Action Comics* run. Kitted out in a less-than-super get-up of jeans and boots, this Superman is a vigilante outlaw, his altruism an unknown quality and his power a potential threat to his authority. The rebooted comic might ➤



**"PEOPLE WILL SAY THAT
CHRIS REEVE IS CANON, BUT THE
SOURCE MATERIAL IS WHERE
SUPERMAN CAME FROM"**

HENRY CAVILL

➤ not have been close to hand, but its themes are there through the many other comics referenced in Goyer's script. As far as cinemagoers are concerned, this is an all-new Superman – but geeks know better.

"People will say that Chris Reeve is canon, but the source material is where Superman came from," argues Cavill, "and that's the story I wanted to tell. Superman is still Superman, but we need to present him in a way which is current."

In the trailer alone we can spot several nods and even direct lifts from the panels. Jor-El (Russell Crowe)'s narration is taken almost word-for-word from Grant Morrison's must-read *All-Star Superman* (2005). Then there's a reference to Mark Waid's *Superman: Birthright* (2004), where the 'S' shield is revealed to be a Kryptonian symbol for 'hope', and in the same scene the movie stays true to John Byrne's 1986 *Man Of Steel* comics, where Lois Lane (Amy Adams) is the one who christens him 'Superman'. It's far more true to the character than to assume a man with so much humility somehow came up with the moniker himself.

A PREVIEW OF THE MOVIE'S EMOTIONAL CRUX – A MAN CAUGHT BETWEEN TWO WORLDS – IS YET ANOTHER HOMAGE. AS A YOUNG CLARK KENT ASKS, "CAN'T I JUST PRETEND TO BE YOUR SON?" IN A LINE STRAIGHT FROM GEOFF JOHNS' *SUPERMAN: SECRET ORIGIN* (2009). Goyer even wrote the foreword for the collector's edition, saying this particular moment "contextualised Superman in a way that I'm not sure has ever really been done before... For the first time I was able to grasp how lonely Clark must have been when he was growing up." The fact that we're actively combing trailers for these nuggets is a testament to the tectonic shift in people's perception of comic-books. What was once a loose guideline has become superhero movie lore, and echoing the spirit of the canon seems the only way of telling the 'ultimate' origin story. No longer is the Joker allowed to be Joe Chill as in 1989's *Batman*; this is an age where only Joe Chill can be Joe Chill.

Indeed, this retelling aims to bring the man of tomorrow in line with the superheroes we're holding out for today: tortured souls who wear their inner turmoil on their capes. It's ironic, then, that a character forever associated with 'truth, justice and



The team behind the camera were well placed to deliver.



CAVILL'S COMICS

Three of Henry Cavill's favourite Superman comic-books

The Death Of Superman

Writers: Dan Jurgens, Louise Simonson, Roger Stern, Jerry Ordway **Artists:** Brett Breeding, Doug Hazlewood, Dennis Janke, Denis Rodier
Published: 1992

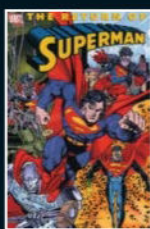


In a headline-grabbing move, they killed Superman! "It's a fantastic story, and I love the

artwork," says Cavill. "It's a true showing of what the hero is capable of."

The Return Of Superman

Writers: Dan Jurgens, Karl Kesel, Roger Stern, Louise Simonson, Gerard Jones **Artists:** Romeo Tanghal, Tom Grummett, Jackson Guice, Brett Breeding, Dennis Janke, Denis Rodier, Jon Bogdanove, Doug Hazlewood, Dan Jurgens
Published: 1993



Following the death of Supes, four men emerge claiming to be the real deal in a plot full of twists and

turns. "I like how the character is broken up into different facets," he says.

Superman: Red Son

Writer: Mark Millar
Artist: Dave Johnson
Published: 2003



What if Kal-El had landed in Ukraine instead of Kansas, becoming the champion of the

common worker in stead of America? According to Cavill, "*Red Son* gives a completely different perspective on the same character."



**"YOU'RE GOING TO SEE
A SUPERMAN YOU'VE
NEVER SEEN BEFORE"**
ZACK SNYDER



Was Henry Cavill the Superman to define this generation?

the American way' has always been an outsider, reflecting the fears and aspirations of his creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster – second-generation Jewish immigrants growing up in the America of the Great Depression. The Hebraic origin of Superman's story isn't as overt as the literally Jewish Magneto (*X-Men*) or Ben Grimm (*Fantastic Four*), but Siegel and Shuster's worldview is undeniably extant: baby Superman's journey to Earth and subsequent adoption is essentially the story of Moses. Even 'Kal-El' is Hebrew for 'voice of God'. *Man Of Steel* isn't telling us anything we didn't already know in positing a man pulled between the lost land and culture of his birth and the new land that raised him, but it's intriguing that Goyer and Snyder have chosen to enhance this aspect of the character. It's a side to Supes that us not as heavily explored in previous on-screen retellings of this well-trod origin story and what most people will see as a radical redefinition.

"I think it not only made him come alive," agrees Roven, "but relatable, because many of us feel alienated in certain times in our life, if not throughout our life about certain things. Certainly when you're growing up, as a teenager you are questioning a great many things, whether it's authority or what your purpose is, and as your body goes through changes you're also feeling kind of weird and alienated. We felt that the character who was going through those things in a much grander way would still be a great access."

"I was surprised by how complex Superman is," adds Cavill. "People have called him boring in the past. He's not boring; he's just difficult to represent perfectly. If you read all the comic-books, there's actually a huge amount which makes him very complex, certainly in *The Return Of Superman* [1993] you see how he's broken down into all these different facets of his personality which, when separate, don't work, and when combined they make this wonderful character." As such, Cavill says he approaches these various guises – Clark Kent, Kal-El and Superman – as three facets of the same person.

Man Of Steel will show a younger Clark than even *Smallville*'s angsty teen icon, navigating the tricky hallways of high school and elevating the influence of his parents on this would-be saviour. In another move to differentiate this film, Snyder cast Diane Lane, the youngest actress yet to play Martha Kent, alongside Kevin Costner as Jonathan Kent.

Their human values will wrestle with the otherworldly influence of his biological father, Jor-El. "It's difficult enough to have a child who's being bullied, and they don't understand why and they're upset," Cavill says, "but to be so extremely different and feel so alien – without actually knowing you are an alien – would be horrifying. Therefore, the connection to his parents – who look after him and help him understand, even though they don't understand themselves – must be incredibly powerful."

THE SAYING GOES THAT A HERO IS ONLY AS GOOD AS HIS VILLAIN, BUT SUPERMAN HAS ONLY EVER HAD TWO IN THE MOVIES THAT ARE WORTH A DAMN – LEX LUTHOR, THE WORST OF HUMANITY'S HUBRIS AND

ambition, and General Zod, the worst of Krypton's arrogance and superiority. While recent Spidey and Batman reboots carved a clear demarcation with the past by recruiting villains not seen in live action for some time, it will be Michael Shannon's performance as Zod that separates this big bad from Terence Stamp's.

"What he brings to the character is powerful and scary," says Cavill. "People would say on set all day



"TO BE SO EXTREMELY DIFFERENT WITHOUT ACTUALLY KNOWING YOU ARE AN ALIEN WOULD BE HORRIFYING"
HENRY CAVILL

➤ long, 'I wouldn't want him looking at me like that!'" So far we've only had a taster of Zod's menace, laid out in a threatening viral message. Amid the static he snarls: "Surrender within 24 hours or watch this world suffer the consequences." Snyder has confirmed that his General won't be barking the order to "Kneel before Zod" and, controversially, won't be scuppered by Kryptonite, as the substance won't feature in this film ("It's all emotional Kryptonite," says Snyder). As a fellow Kryptonian, however, the pair will display similar superpowers, this direct parallel hammering home how powerful Superman's heart and iron will really is.

But as two titans land steel-shattering blows on one another, it takes the scale of the action well beyond levels of threat an audience can identify with. This is why writers so often unleashed the Kryptonite, just to show Kal-El battered and bruised in a way that we could actually feel and not just stare dumbly at another VFX light show from the director that brought us *Sucker Punch* and *300*.



Few films have showed Kal-El's human side – which this will address.

"I think that no matter how bigger the spectacle that you can give people – and we feel we delivered on quite a lot of spectacle – it doesn't mean anything ultimately unless you're really engaged in the characters and their drama," Roven ponders. "We feel that we've really made a very compelling story with issues that even though they're on a really grand, operatic scale, they're relatable. No matter how big we get in terms of the great problems of the film and how they're translated into this amazing action in terms of trying to find their resolution, ultimately you have to get down to the intimate exchanges between people – beings, in this case, you know, Superman's an alien, and clearly some of his antagonists are aliens – that's what we tried to accomplish, and I think we were successful."

DITCHING THE LOW-CUT ROBE OF SUPERMAN II, THESE ALIEN ANTAGONISTS EXHIBIT THE SAME TASTE IN FUNCTIONAL (SUPER) MENSWEAR. OUT OF HIS MOTION-CAPTURE SPACE ARMOUR, MICHAEL SHANNON'S COSTUME IS THE SAME MUSCLE-CLINGING, MUTED BLUE colour with basketball-like texture as our hero. This toned down suit was necessary if they wanted to be taken seriously, says Cavill. "To have a costume like the older version in this day and age – where sci-fi has come such a long way and people have certain expectations – wouldn't quite work. It wouldn't lend the gravitas to the character, because kids are going to go, 'Why is he wearing pyjamas?' That's our new generation, and this is who it's for. Yes, it's for adults as well, but the kids are the ones who are going to grow up without any knowledge of previous incarnations, and they will probably look at them and say, 'Why is he wearing his underwear on the outside?'"

Speaking of the suit, this was a crucial part of the audition process: if you could stand, hand on hips, dressed in Christopher Reeve's old togs without everyone erupting with laughter, you were halfway there. This initiation sealed the deal for Cavill. It was a role that was almost his in 2006's *Superman Returns* until Brandon Routh snatched it from his grasp. "I think this is very much the right [Superman] film for me," he says. "Whether I'm relieved I didn't get the last one, I couldn't really say. It was a completely different movie [dubbed *Superman: Flyby*] and a different director [McG] than what was actually released."

The 30-year-old Brit piled on bulk for the role, eating 5,000 calories a day, but the black wavy hair and cleft chin were his to begin with. Cinemagoers will believe he's Superman, but will we believe he ➤



Michael Shannon's Zod is described as "powerful and scary."



can fly? When it came to realising his most legendary power, Cavill considered his options. “As opposed to just flying with a fist out, I thought about how I would accelerate and decelerate,” he explains. “What would I consider ‘effort’ flying, and how do I show that? How do I show that I’m enjoying flying and playing around, like birds do? I wanted to make it completely my own, because he’s not like any other animal out there. What he does is not by wings or anything like that; it’s unique.”

Fidelity to the comics may be geek-bait that gets our hearts racing, but for mainstream cinema-goers, nods to the longboxes fly over their heads like a babyshuttle to Kansas. No, what stands out about *Man Of Steel* is the muted palette and introspective frowning that lets them know this isn’t the primary coloured fairy tale of the Richard Donner years. But conversely, ‘dark and gritty’ isn’t what fans of Superman want from the character.

“People are assuming that it’s dark and gritty because so many of the team worked on the *Dark Knight* trilogy,” explains Roven, “and Clark/Kal-El is a complete different character from Batman and Bruce Wayne. They only share one thing in common, because the Batman is a character who is human, has no superpowers, and has taken his body and mind and made them extraordinary. Superman is an alien, has superpowers as a result of it, and is challenged because of him being an alien and an outsider. The only thing they really share in common is that they were both orphans, but the way that they dealt with that fact is severely different.”

“This has a strong grounding in reality, but we’re not removing any of the ‘superness’ from Superman,” Cavill confirms. “We’re combining the two by having a realistic world with this unrealistic character existing in it, and asking what that means for everyone involved.” *Man Of Steel* promises to be the story we can all recite by heart – Krypton, the Fortress of Solitude, Smallville – but told in a way that will resonate and prove wrong the harshest of critics.



The world may be the gloomy one we endure, but Superman is no less a symbol of hope and triumph against the greatest of odds. We’re optimistic. After all, that’s what the Man of Steel is really about. ☞

Man Of Steel is out now on DVD, Blu-ray and Blu-ray 3D

ZACK SNYDER SPEAKS

“I was frightened because it’s Superman,” admits the director



was, he would win.

When Chris [Nolan] asked me to talk about the character and about potentially making this movie, I was frightened because it’s Superman, and I wasn’t sure whether I had anything poignant to say. I had so much respect for the character that I just wasn’t sure what I had to give.

I was thinking, ‘How do I make a movie that honours this character of Kal-El and Clark Kent? How do I make a movie that honours Superman?’ But Chris told me a story about Superman that became the script David Goyer wrote from the idea Chris had come up with. I left that meeting, which was the dawn of this project, thinking, ‘Wow! They’ve got it right!’

We took the mythology seriously. We take him as a character seriously. You’re going to see a Superman you’ve never seen before. We

tried to approach this as though there’s never been a Superman movie before, but at the same time respecting the canon and mythology.

Michael Shannon has such great enthusiasm and dedication. You could get actors who go, ‘Oh right, it’s Zod, it’s not 100 per cent serious,’ or play it with a wink – there is none of that with him. His effort is to make it realistic and understand what this character has to go through.

Then you have Henry [Cavill], who basically is Superman, and that dynamic. I was incredibly fortunate to play with those guys, who really were giving all they had to bring a level

of commitment so that audiences will get an opportunity to really have their heroes taken seriously.

The way the whole thing culminated was that we made a big movie that needs to be seen in a theatre. I know that the movie will be seen all over the world, but for me it belongs in a cinema. I am sorry to even have to say this nowadays, but we shot the movie on film and anamorphic because I wanted the film to be a big movie-going experience, full of action, emotion and the biggest superhero in the world. So that’s what we did. I think I have given you all something awesome.”



Snyder seemed confident that his approach would pay dividends.

EVOLVE OR DIE

SUPERHERO MOVIES HAVE CHANGED, AND THE X-MEN ARE CHANGING WITH THEM. DIRECTOR **BRYAN SINGER**, WRITER/PRODUCER **SIMON KINBERG** AND THE STARS OF **X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST** TAKE US THROUGH THE NEXT STAGE IN SUPERHUMAN EVOLUTION...

AS NEW SPECIES ARE FORMED THROUGH NATURAL EVOLUTION, OTHERS WILL BECOME RARER AND RARER, AND FINALLY EXTINCT. THE FORMS WHICH STAND IN CLOSEST COMPETITION WITH THOSE UNDERGOING MODIFICATION AND improvement will naturally suffer most."

So wrote the father of evolution, 19th Century naturalist Charles Darwin. It's not for nothing that the quote sat neatly typed upon the frontispiece of a screenplay tweeted by *X-Men* director Bryan Singer.

The conflict between humans and the next stage of human evolution – mutants, super from birth, but not always heroes – is scoured deep into the *X-Men* canon. The first film opened with incredulous lawmakers discussing how to legislate

their way around the thorny issue of adamantium claws. Now, 14 years and four *X-Men* films (plus two *Wolverine* movies) later, and the issue is close to resolving itself courtesy of the Sentinels, mutant-hunting deathbots who have turned the near future into a bleak, battle-scarred dystopia.

Picking their way through the wasteland of 2024 are the scraps of mutant-kind, the remnants of the original X-Men last seen together in Brett Ratner's much-maligned *X-Men: The Last Stand*: Wolverine (Hugh Jackman), Professor X (Patrick Stewart), Storm (Halle Berry), Colossus (Daniel Cudmore), Iceman (Shawn Ashmore) and Kitty Pryde (Ellen Page), plus reformed arch-nemesis Magneto (Ian McKellen) and an all-new B-team of lesser-known

superhumans. They're not going to save the day, but they can save *a* day by propelling one of their number back through time to 1972 to stop or divert the Sentinel program masterminded by Bolivar Trask (Peter Dinklage) and unite mutantkind's opposing forces, the humanist – and depressed – Charles 'Professor X' Xavier (James McAvoy) and the absolutist – and imprisoned – Erik 'Magneto' Lehnsherr (Michael Fassbender), with Mystique (Jennifer Lawrence) trapped somewhere between their moral extremes.

It's not just mutants who need to adapt to survive, either. Bryan Singer and Sam Raimi kick-started the modern age of the superhero movie with 2000's *X-Men* and 2002's *Spider-Man*, but over a decade ➤

X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST



THE MODERN AGE

X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

"MY NEXT GOAL IS HOW DID THE X-MEN COME TOGETHER? WE DON'T REALLY KNOW THAT YET, AND THAT STORY HASN'T BEEN TOLD" BRYAN SINGER

It's quite possibly the biggest ensemble yet for a superhero movie.

on, their legacy is an agenda seemingly dominated by the brash synergy of Disney's Marvel Studios and the Christopher Nolan-inspired orchestral superheroics of *Man Of Steel*, and audiences don't care about who came first – just who's best.

"I don't know if there's ever been another movie quite like it," reflects writer and producer Simon Kinberg. "In a way it's like two separate strands of the franchise, but in another way it's two separate franchises, because the tone of *First Class* and the acting talent of *First Class* is different from the look, feel and voice of the original *X-Men* movies."

"It also explores X-Men periods in a different way," adds director Singer. "One new element is that with *First Class* we could make a Silver Age-era Marvel movie, and now we're able to explore the Seventies with this movie and perhaps the Eighties with *Apocalypse* – it's really fun. The one thing we're doing that other people aren't is messing with history – I like to think we're complementing history and making it more exciting... well, *Captain America* did that, but we're doing it our way."

Based on a two-part *Uncanny X-Men* story arc by classic creative team Chris Claremont and John Byrne, 1980's 'Days Of Future Past' underpins much of the *X-Men* mythology. It has inspired animated adventures, ranging

from two 1993 episodes of *X-Men: The Animated Series* to a 2013 instalment of *Ultimate Spider-Man*, been revisited by countless comic-book storylines, and was even homaged in an episode of NBC's *Heroes*. It has cast a shadow over the *X-Men* movie universe for a long time too, with the robot Sentinels being considered as possible villains in almost every movie, while the storyline was being toyed with as the plot for *X-Men 4* before *The Last Stand* forced the franchise into shutdown.

SINGER IS RELIEVED HE WAITED. AFTER GRADUATING FROM XAVIER'S SCHOOL FOR GIFTED YOUNGSTERS AND MOVING TO METROPOLIS TO WORK ON SUPERMAN

Returns, he dodged the deathblow of *The Last Stand* and took a back seat as producer on Matthew Vaughn's sleek and understated Sixties-set prequel, *X-Men: First Class*. As long games go, it's proven to be a doozy – either he's got the luck of Longshot or the prescience of Layla Miller, but that oft-tabled motion to bring Claremont and Byrne's time-travel epic to the big screen is a whole lot easier in 2014 than it would have been in 2006. No need for dodgy de-aging, a la *The Last Stand*'s teen Jean Grey flashback.

"Yeah, absolutely," agrees Singer. "It's a wonderful benefit, because not only have ➤

The dynamic between Charles Xavier and Magneto is one of the constants of the film series.

SAID IN TOOTH & CLAW

Hugh Jackman talks Wolverine, comics and time travel

Wolverine made an icon out of Hugh Jackman, and in return he made the X-Men's fan-favourite antihero the centrepiece of the series. On a high after the success of *The Wolverine*, Jackman is passing on the torch from the original cast to their fresh-faced period predecessors with *X-Men: Days Of Future Past*...

✕ Wolverine has been a big part of your life for so long. Are you constantly aware of his legacy?
For so many years I was grateful and taking it movie by movie. Somehow, with *The Wolverine* and now this, it's starting to dawn on me that it's been 15 years, and I'm starting to do re-units at my house on Saturday night – I'm just kidding. But no, it has dawned on me how lucky and blessed I am, and how much I love this character – he's sort of like a brother for me.

"I LOVE THIS CHARACTER, HE'S SORT OF LIKE A BROTHER FOR ME"
HUGH JACKMAN

✕ The Wolverine and Days Of Future Past go right back to the comics. Are audiences more at ease with the source material?
There's more confidence in the genre from studios, and I think creators like [Christopher] Nolan and Bryan Singer have shown that you can be true to the source material and still make a movie entertaining for those who have never read a comic-book in their life.

Something like *The Wolverine*, which was a smaller story, a more interior story, and the success of a movie like that thrills me because I'm proud of it, but it shows that we can focus on character, emotion, love, comedy – everything about that character, and that is what will keep people coming back.

✕ Does it surprise you that Logan always seems to have more to give as a character?

I keep going back to the comics for that reason, because there is so much inspiration there. I've enjoyed playing Wolverine more than ever, I think [James] Mangold as a director [of *The Wolverine*] pushed me to find different areas and places for him, different vulnerabilities, and it does surprise me that after seven movies I'm enjoying it more than ever. The scripts are getting better in every way – I'm finding it surprising and by no means boring.

✕ Was it strange stepping into the First Class-era cast?

I loved it. First of all, what an incredible group of actors they are. They have an incredibly strong bond as a group, so it was sort of weird for me and Bryan [Singer], the two of us had been shooting for six weeks [in the future setting], by the time they all came on we felt like we were the outsiders, which was interesting. They're a very strong group, and I loved those guys, I love how seriously they approach it and how much fun they have.

✕ Do you think Days Of Future Past is really taking the superhero movie forward?

Yes, because it's ambitious. If you go back to the DNA of the comic-book,

the reason people keep going back is the characters. If they're boring, they're not going to go back. They don't care how well it's drawn, the characters and the storylines they put in – they're one of the cool things you get in comic-books. It is based on one of the comic-books, but there's new characters and surprises, and the idea in movie terms of getting to see [Ian] McKellen and [Michael] Fassbender play the same role – there's so much meat on the bone for fans.

✕ After The Wolverine, Logan seems more at ease with himself. Did you talk much about how he changed between then and Days Of Future Past?

Yeah, he has come to peace with not being at peace, you know what I mean? He is a lot more comfortable with who he is, and he understands the mantle of being the Wolverine, and he is embracing that, but in the interim years – which isn't that long – the situation in the world has become fairly catastrophic fairly quickly that the problems of "What's my life?" and all of that have gone out the window.

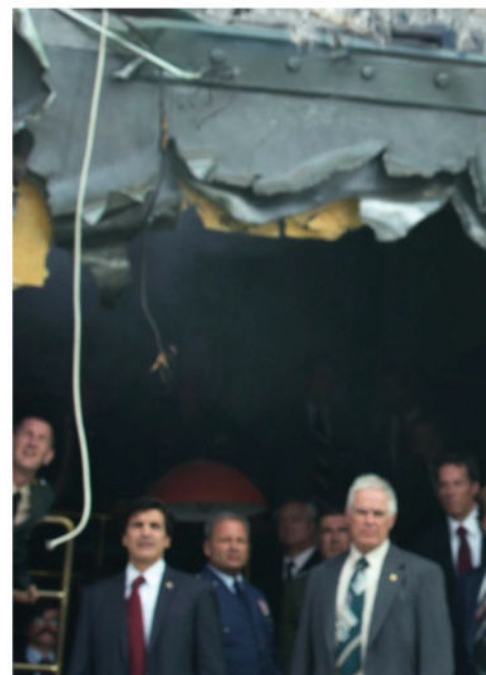
✕ Logan has made a lot of mistakes and seen a lot of tragedy. What does the idea of going back in time mean to him?
The larger mission is so great that it has to be a priority, but the temptation to revisit every mistake is great. I tried to either keep those things alive or see possibilities where he could try to right the wrongs. That's something we talked about, because he's particularly defined by the regrets in his life.

Also, one of the fun things about this is that while physically he's able to do the trip, he's in many ways the last person who should be doing it.



"IF YOU WANT TO GIVE ME ROBERT DOWNEY JR IN A METAL SUIT AND HAVE HIM JOIN THE X-MEN, THEN LET'S GO HEAD-TO-HEAD"
BRYAN SINGER

Mystique (Jennifer Lawrence) is caught between two moral sides.



How Erik's character arc will fit into the series as a whole remains to be seen.

MIND OVER MATTER

James McAvoy on breaking down Professor X

Charles Xavier isn't in a good place. After James McAvoy showed us a younger, brasher and more self-righteously assured Professor X in *First Class*, the events of the film cut him down as surely as that stray bullet in his spine. With the people closest to him – Magneto and Mystique – gone, James McAvoy reveals how this master telepath could keep dodging his destiny...

⊗ You get to do a lot of screaming in *Days Of Future Past*. Is it fun to have all the big drama?

My character was very different. There's a lot of new stuff to find in the character that we haven't seen before, but he wasn't very conflicted and didn't have any internal tension, but at the end of that movie he gets abandoned, basically. Physically he's debilitated really, and emotionally he is too. Coming into this movie, you have a lot of conflict, a lot of stuff to be figuring out and a lot of anguish to get through. To take the most balanced and together of the X-Men, as we've always seen him, the most self-possessed and the most sorted, to give him his nightmare, was really good.

⊗ Are you bringing in any elements of Patrick Stewart's Charles?

What I thought we might do is put you there for the second movie, then when we got the script I was actually really pleased that we hadn't – they'd

actually moved him further away from that. I think if we get to a third movie... it depends, they might want to stretch it out for another six movies, although that may be a bit much, I feel like by the end of the third movie I've got to start going there because that's sort of the deal we had with the audience when we started *First Class*. Like, "Right, I'm going to show them different, and isn't that interesting and fun?" But you have to respect where the character goes – unless they do something like changing the timeline, and now you've got a whole

"YOU HAVE TO RESPECT WHERE THE CHARACTER GOES – UNLESS THEY CHANGE THE TIMELINE"

JAMES MCAVOY

alternate reality, which sounds like crap get-out-clause movie-making, but it is also true of comic-books as well [laughs], where you've got alternate realities where one character's a good guy and one character's a bad guy.

⊗ How do you find that spin on such an established character?

If you could go back and talk to yourself 40 years ago, I don't know if you'd sit down and [not] think it was an entirely different person. For me, it was important that I remained very, very different. The one key element that they share, which

should always be present, is that they both share an incredible capacity for empathy and the imagination that allows you to really understand people. That has always been Charles' real power – his greatest attribute is his ability to put himself in somebody else's shoes and care. What's interesting about my character is that I get to challenge that empathy. He's fighting against that empathy and he wants to shut down, because it just hurts too much to care – to feel and truly understand, because not only can he now see other people and voyeuristically piggy-back on them telepathically, but he can now feel it, and it hurts.

⊗ How does working with Bryan Singer compare to Matthew Vaughn?

It was different and similar in lots of ways – different energy, but sometimes similar choices, arrived at through different meanings at times. They can both be quite bold with their choices and they can both make quite daring moves sometimes, so that was nice. Also, with Bryan he's the guy that's credited with rejuvenating the superhero genre with the first *X-Men*, and with showing that way that's become much more de rigueur – you can take it seriously. You felt you were in safe hands that knew the territory, and it allowed you at times to go a bit further, and I feel I went quite far with the character, because I was in a safe environment.



In the present, Magneto is still causing trouble.



QUICK AS YOU LIKE

American Horror Story's Evan Peters on Quicksilver

Your costume has received a drubbing online. Will people change their minds?

The pictures are taken out of context. You do forget that it's 1972, he's a teenager and he's kind of a punk before he becomes the grown Quicksilver. This is when he's a kid living in his parents' basement. So I think the costume fits well with what happens in the story, and people are going to be excited.

Is his relationship with Magneto and the X-Men as complex as in the comics?

You don't know if he's going to be good or bad – he's on that teetering point. He has a tendency to be excited by mischief and anarchy, so there's that side, but at this point he's not evil – he just likes breaking the law a bit.

We see your sister in the film. Is there a hint that she could be the Scarlet Witch?

I think we'll find out in future films. You get the feeling that all these characters are coming from the comic-book world and are tied together in the same way.

It must be strange not being the only Quicksilver, with Aaron Taylor-Johnson playing him in *Avengers: Age Of Ultron*.

I'm excited to see Aaron's performance. It's such a cool character and such a cool superpower, so I'm excited to see both of them. I don't see any competition, because it's two different worlds. This takes place in the Seventies and he's a kid, so it's completely different. I'm definitely excited to be able to play the character, you know?



Daniel Cudmore returns as Colossus, alongside new face Blink (Bingbing Fan).

➤ some of these actors gone on to become huge stars in their own right, but also they're not familiar characters, so to go back and find a Magneto very different from where we left him in *First Class* and to be able to see characters from the future interact with those characters from the past is very exciting.

"If you don't know the characters, I ran a rough cut of the movie for a lot of people who'd never seen an *X-Men* film. I've tried to dig them up," the director laughs, "and it's a nice overview, they're not really lost; they understand what's going on. They may not know the specifics about certain characters, but they get the thrust of the story and they understand the stakes, because at its heart it's as much a time-travel movie as it is an *X-Men* movie."

INTO ALL THE SPACES WHERE SINGER WASN'T STEPPED KINBERG. WRITER ON THE LAST STAND, PRODUCER ON FIRST CLASS AND WRITER/PRODUCER ON BOTH DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

and its much-hyped 2016 follow-up *X-Men: Apocalypse*, he's now every bit Singer's – and long-term producer and superhero supremo Lauren Shuler Donner's – equal as a custodian of the *X-Men* universe. It's even rumoured that his role as producer/writer of Josh Trank's *The Fantastic Four* is so that 20th Century Fox can bring the first family into a Marvel Phase Two-style shared universe of their own.

"We didn't have any idea when we were making *First Class* that we would be making *Days Of Future Past* and uniting the casts," Kinberg admits. "In our conversations we thought it would be interesting to bring Ian [McKellen] and Patrick [Stewart] back just as bookends to the movie, to start the movie like *Saving Private Ryan* or *Schindler's List* and call up logs with the older versions of the characters. That was our initial impulse;

it was just gonna bring them back for these omni-scenes, they weren't going to be integrated with the storytelling of the movie at all. Then, as we started talking about that, *Days Of Future Past* was always one of my favourite comics – that and 'Dark Phoenix' [another iconic Claremont and Byrne arc from 1976/7] were my two favourites. We screwed up 'Dark Phoenix' with *The Last Stand*, so this was an opportunity either to make amends for that or screw up another great run!

"I brought the idea of *Days Of Future Past* to Matthew [Vaughn, then set to return as director] and Bryan, who was the producer, and to the studio and everyone was daunted about what the physical reality of that would be. Even in calling up actors back together, not just in terms of their contracts but also in terms of their schedules, but everyone loved it conceptually and creatively. Then there's all kinds of challenges in telling a time-travel story with ten or 12 main characters, but the voice of this particular movie came to me very easily. Strangely – as you'll see – it's in some ways a combination of the grittiness and groundedness of Matthew's movie, of *First Class*, with the slightly bigger, glossier *X-Men* that Bryan created."

Although the comic-books have always exerted a pull on their movie spin-offs, it's over the last few years especially that links with the source material have been worn boldly on spandex sleeves. While the first three *X-Men* films kept their dot-shaded origins concealed beneath form-fitting leather, last year's *The Wolverine* – based on Chris Claremont and Frank Miller's ninja-filled 1982 miniseries – and this year's *Days Of Future Past* have it front and centre. Inevitably, this throws up its own obstacles.

"I say this – joking – with blood on my hands: with *X3* we wanted to tell the *Dark* ➤



➤ *Phoenix* story, and the movie got sidetracked so that the base story, which was the Phoenix story, became the B-story of that movie, and the mutant cure, which was inspired by one that Joss Whedon created called 'Gifted' [in *Astonishing X-Men*, with artist John Cassaday], became the core of the movie. Then *First Class*, to some extent was from a less famous comic arc [2008's *X-Men: First Class*, by Jeff Parker and Roger Cruz], and then when I presented people with *Days Of Future Past* it was, 'How do we stay as true as possible to the book?' Because it has its own separate challenges and demands, namely who's going to be sent back in time, because Kitty's consciousness being sent back 50 years would be a problem, because she wouldn't have been born yet."

IT WAS A SIMPLE QUESTION WITH A GREAT ANSWER: WOLVERINE. FAN-FAVOURITE HUGH JACKMAN HAD STEERED THE SURLY SCRAPPER THROUGH SOME OF THE LOWEST

ebbs in *X-Men* history – *The Last Stand* and *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* – without a dip in enthusiasm for the character. Arguably Marvel's last breakout household name since the Sixties (although another furry killer, Rocket Raccoon, may end up stealing that

crown by the year's end in *Guardians Of The Galaxy*), Wolverine was the ideal candidate to step into the past, following up on his foul-mouthed cameo in *First Class* by projecting himself back in time and into his old body – one of the perks of being an endlessly regenerating near-immortal.

"He's the guy coming here with the knowledge," explains Singer, "but he doesn't have the patience. Initially, the whole idea was for Charles Xavier to go back in time, but he couldn't do it – he physically couldn't make the trip – so the dynamic of these characters [is reversed]. Wolverine, who is usually the character that needs the most corraling, suddenly now he's put in the position of babysitter for these young characters who've reached the lowest of the low in their lives, and he's got to rally them together to do this mission. Of course, it all goes wrong, and then you wonder, is he gonna succeed or not?"

"It reminded me a lot of making *The Usual Suspects*, because in the first part of the movie I shot the future sequences with Hugh Jackman and the cast from the original films – a lot like when I was shooting *The Usual Suspects* with Kevin Spacey, Chazz Palminteri, Dan Hedaya, Giancarlo Esposito



Peter Dinklage takes on villain duties as Bolivar Trask.



The rise of Lawrence's star has brought her a more prominent role in the series.



COUNTDOWN TO APOCALYPSE

Bryan Singer, Hugh Jackman and Simon Kinberg on *X-Men: Apocalypse*

Granted near limitless power and lifespan due to his mutant ability to manipulate molecules, En Sabah Nur was born in Ancient Egypt and has controlled the evolution of mutants throughout history, particularly the X-Men. Whatever his role in *X-Men: Apocalypse*, it's going to cut deep...

3 IT'LL CARRY ON FROM DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

It's clear that however *Days Of Future Past* winds up, the timeline will be irrevocably altered for good, and the future we thought ourselves familiar with from the first three movies could easily unfold differently. "In a way, it feels like from this point forward we can do whatever we want," reveals Simon Kinberg, "but we'll be moving forward with some of the actors from the *First Class*/*Days Of Future Past* cast, so there's stuff we've done in these last couple of movies that we'll definitely continue doing for them, at least in *Apocalypse*, if not more movies going forward."

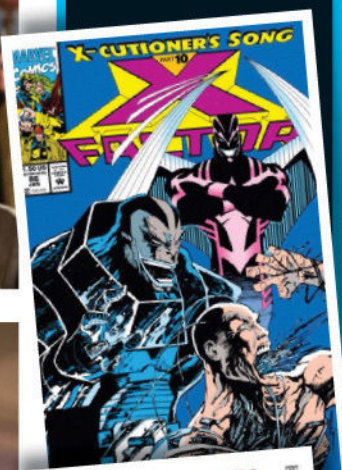
2 IT COULD UNDO X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE

With Vietnam at the backdrop of *Days Of Future Past*, Logan should be somewhere else – getting inducted into Team X and making the life choices that get him his adamantium bones and cost him his memories. "This has all been thought through, trust me," says Hugh Jackman. "I'm trying to answer this without giving too much away – there's a really exciting set of possibilities about what is proposed by having him go back, but it is thought out in terms of how this plays into *X-Men*, so in a way you can see many different possibilities, and in a way it will completely make sense."

1 CYCLOPS, JEAN GREY AND STORM ARE BACK

Apocalypse will wind the clock so far forward that it takes on a neon glow: the Eighties. "My next goal is how did the X-Men come together? That story hasn't been told yet, so [*Days Of Future Past*] is the inbetweenquel," laughs Singer. "It's in between the birth of that relationship with Charles and Erik and the formation of the X-Men."

Of course, this means *Apocalypse* is in the right time zone to revisit and recast iconic original characters Cyclops, Jean Grey and Storm. "Yeah," Singer confirms when that question is put to him, "exactly."





"WE SCREWED UP DARK PHOENIX WITH X3, SO THIS WAS AN OPPORTUNITY EITHER TO MAKE AMENDS FOR THAT OR SCREW UP ANOTHER GREAT COMIC" SIMON KINDERG



Nicholas Hoult dons the blue fur again as Beast.



Sunspot (Adan Canto) joins the returning Kitty Pryde (Ellen Page), Iceman (Shawn Ashmore) and Colossus.

X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

and all those people. Then suddenly they all left and we started a new movie with James McAvoy, Michael Fassbender, Jennifer Lawrence and Nicholas Hoult, which we shot for months and months, and I still carried over Hugh Jackman as I had carried over Kevin Spacey when we joined the Suspects in that movie."

IN EMBARKING ON NOT ONLY THE MOST AMBITIOUS X-MEN FILM TO DATE, BUT PERHAPS EVEN ONE OF THE MOST AMBITIOUS SUPERHEROES FILMS TO DATE (AT LEAST UNTIL

Warner Bros gets *Justice League* going) *X-Men: Days Of Future Past* has ridden a rollercoaster of reactions with the perceived complexity of the storyline, and the tidal wave of new mutants forced an acid-reflux of doubt and derision. It's well-founded to a point, as joining the *First Class* cast in the Vietnam War backdrop of 1972 are a younger incarnation of Toad (Evan Jonigkeit) and super-speedy Quicksilver (Evan Peters), while the already bloated future team gets blazing-hot Sunspot (Adan Canto), portal-chucking Blink (Fan Bingbing), hunter/tracker Warpath (Booboo Stewart) and the energy-slinging badass Bishop (Omar Sy).

The *X-Men* franchise has evolved, and whether it'll reflect the dreams of Professor X or the fears of Magneto – co-existence in the movie landscape, or brutal extermination – remains to be seen, but there's no getting away from Marvel Studios. Kevin Feige's predecessors fired off the film rights to the likes of the *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* long before Disney bought the company and gave it the means to realise its blockbuster potential in-house. Criticisms of *Days Of Future Past's* scale and cast – and predictions of failure – aren't happening in a vacuum; they're as much informed by the partisan nature of fandom as they are by memories of Juggernaut running after Juno in *The Last Stand*. Feige has made no secret of wanting the *X-Men* back at Marvel Studios, and he's got a choir of voices clamouring for that across social networks.

"It's not healthy for us," asserts Singer. "I'll tell you why: they're both comic-books, and at some point you can expand the universes, that's where the comparison ends. It sounds defensive, and it is defensive, but only because people make comparisons between this and *The Avengers*, which is ludicrous.

"*The Avengers* is a mash-up of massive single character franchises of incredibly familiar characters and Iron Man. And did I mention Iron Man? Oh, and *by the way* – Iron Man.

"They are huge, colossal franchises that are peppered with all these other characters that are again, extremely famous, and so yes, Fox will at some point synergise these characters, and that process is slowly beginning, but it's very different to taking movies that gross close to \$1 billion and then pushing them together into these giant, broad movies. If you want to give me Robert Downey Jr in a metal suit and have him join the *X-Men*, then yes, let's go head-to-head.

"That being said, this is quite a big movie, and we do have a lot of major factors, and I think we'll do quite well," he adds, "but it's a very different thing. *Avengers* and the Marvel movies are individual franchises based on major characters, that's why there are some Marvel characters in *Avengers* that don't have their own movie, because I don't know if they had their own movie anyone would be that interested.

"We're the bastard stepchild of the comic-book universe, you can go to my mom and she knows who Captain America is, but you try and explain to her who Deadpool is? She doesn't even know the Hulk – 'You know, the Hulk! Green! Big guy!' – so... Gambit? It'll have to be a different process. It's doable, but it's not any way comparable."

The next stage in superhuman evolution may have arrived, but the fight for survival is by no means over. 

X-Men: Days Of Future Past is out on DVD and Blu-ray now.



“BY MAKING GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY, MARVEL COMPLETELY OPENED UP THE COSMIC TOYBOX AND EVERYTHING THAT’S RELATED TO THAT”

DAN ABNETT

BIG DAMN HEROES

HOW MARVEL'S MISFIT BAND OF KILLERS, THIEVES, A WALKING TREE AND A PSYCHOTIC RACCOON BECAME THE SAVIOURS OF OUR SUMMER...

EVERYBODY KNOWS IT'S THE UNLIKELY HEROES THAT ARE THE TRULY GREAT ONES. WE'VE HAD AN ENDLESS PARADE OF SQUARE-JAWED, SIX-PACKED GOOD

citizens to choose from, but last summer we saw an unruly gang of thieves, killers and psychopaths save the galaxy and truly take the Marvel brand to the next level. Forget flowing locks, poster boys and impossibly sculpted goatees; the face of the year's biggest comic-book movie is a lunatic raccoon brandishing a machine gun.

If you went by this evidence, it would make sense that *Guardians Of The Galaxy* was being talked about as Marvel's biggest risk to date. Based on a relatively unknown super-team that's had several different incarnations since its comic-book debut in 1968, it took the Marvel universe to the far reaches of space and boasts a roster of, as team leader Peter Quill (Chris Pratt) put it, "A thief, two thugs, an assassin and a maniac." They're so underestimated in their own movie that Quill can't even get his own self-aggrandising alias – Star-Lord – to stick.

"That's the great thing about the whole cast: at the end of the day, we really are just a bunch of misfits, man," enthuses star Dave Bautista, who plays vengeful, muscle-bound

Guardian Drax the Destroyer. "We don't have these glorified pasts; we've all got pretty rough, messed-up pasts!"

"The Guardians Of The Galaxy are a team of outer space criminals, basically, who get tossed together and find themselves in the presence of something that could be truly evil, and they decide to band together and sort of do away with their sordid past and fight evil together, because they've never done it before," writer/director James Gunn explained when pressed to pitch his heroes at an AMC Q&A. This group's sordid past makes Tony Stark's boozy womanising look almost cosy in comparison.

So we've got self-styled outlaw Star-Lord, who was abducted from Earth as a child, and is still mentally stuck in the Eighties and Han Solo fandom. There's murderous assassin Gamora (Zoe Saldana), the green-skinned deadliest woman in the universe tormented by the fact that supervillain Thanos (Josh Brolin) is her foster father, and Drax, a rage-fuelled goliath who is determined to kill Thanos as payback for the deaths of his family. Finally, there's walking tree Groot (Vin Diesel), who can only say "I am Groot," and Rocket (Bradley Cooper), that aforementioned raccoon who has plenty

to say for himself in between bursts of automatic weapons fire. If this sounds like something different – well, it is.

Alongside co-writer Andy Lanning, veteran Marvel comics writer Dan Abnett is responsible for what is now the definitive *Guardians Of The Galaxy* line-up, shepherding them across a fan-favourite 25-issue run from 2008 to 2010 (plus 36 issues of the equally celebrated *Nova*, which continued to shade in that corner of the cosmos) that directly inspired James Gunn's treatment.

"I thought 'Wow, that's amazing!'" he laughs, recalling the moment when he heard about the movie. "Mainly because, with all due respect to the Guardians Of The Galaxy, they are not premier league, world-famous characters like Iron Man and Captain America. For Marvel to take the plunge and take one of their less well-known things and develop that was rather stunning."

Considering the convoluted history of this not-exactly blockbuster brand, it's not only a minor miracle that *Guardians Of The Galaxy* got the tentpole treatment, but that Abnett and Lanning were able to shape it into something cohesive in the first place. It's all part of one big process – albeit accidental –

SUPER SONGS

What's on Marvel's mightiest mix tapes



A: TROUBLE MAN BY MARVIN GAYE

B: STAR-SPANGLED MAN



A: SHOOT TO THRILL BY AC/DC

B: IRON MAN BY BLACK SABBATH



A: HOOKED ON A FEELING BY BLUE SWEDEN

B: STAR WARS THEME BY JOHN WILLIAMS



A: ORINOCO FLOW BY ENYA

B: THE BEAST IN ME BY JOHNNY CASH



A: TIME IN A BOTTLE BY JIM CROCE

B: THE GREAT GIG IN THE SKY BY PINK FLOYD

whereby a space-bound back-up strip from the fag end of the Silver Age has become a grin-along silver screen actioner set to the uber-camp tribal chorus of Blue Swede's *Hooked On A Feeling*.

"Yeah, *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, traditionally speaking, is a completely different set of characters," explains Abnett. "It's set in the future, and it's Vance Astro, Yondu, Charlie-27 and Martinex, and has nothing to do with this. The idea that they are unrecognised heroes doing whatever they can do anyway, despite the fact that they're not famous like the Avengers, was a cool part of that."

WHEN ABNETT AND LANNING LAUNCHED *GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY* IN THE WAKE OF MARVEL'S ANNIHILATION EVENT, THEY INHERITED A FLEDGLING

team-up of Star-Lord, Groot and Rocket Raccoon, who had been press-ganged from a Kree prison like a star-spanning Dirty Dozen. Already disparate – Star-Lord began life as a pulp adventurer unconnected to the Marvel universe, Groot was a pre-Fantastic Four monster-comic nasty, and Rocket Raccoon a cartoonish swashbuckler – the trio had a handful of canonical appearances to their names, few of which made any sort of logical sense. Although universe-shattering big guns

like Nova, Adam Warlock and Quasar passed through the first few issues of *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, it wasn't long before the creative duo settled on the relatively low-key additions of Drax and Gamora, both Jim Starlin creations with a Thanos-shaped axe to grind.

"It was a case of who are the most interesting, who fits together, who doesn't fit together, because you get internal conflict in the team," Abnett remembers. "So to have Drax and Gamora, who are both antiheroes, and trying to mould them into more noble characters was fun – Star-Lord trying to hold it all together, and Rocket and Groot are like a wonderful Han and Chewie double act. They were individual characters who came from different places, but putting them together, you get this great mix of things. In the course of writing the book, I played around with the line-up several times, but I think the cast as it appears in the film is sort of the definitive core of the team; the ones I consider to be primary members of it."

He's not alone in that belief. When it was time to make the movie, writer/director James Gunn knew exactly where to look, tweeting that Abnett and Lanning are "The fathers of the modern *Guardians Of The Galaxy*! We wouldn't be making this movie without them!"

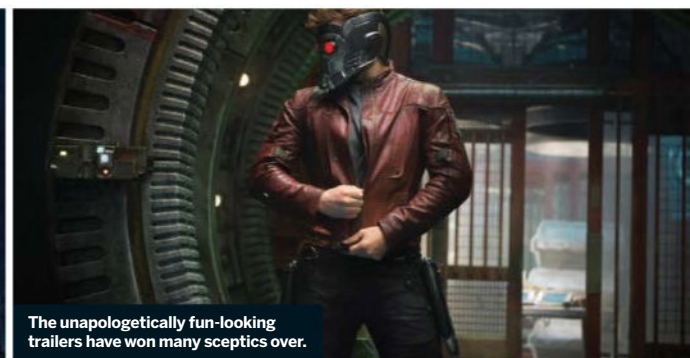
"I think he was being very open about the fact that he'd been inspired by that run, and it was extremely surreal," Abnett tells us.

Gunn's respect for Abnett and Lanning's run is very much reciprocated, and Abnett tells us that a trip on set completely reassured him that his antiheroes were in safe hands. "[He's] really, really clever," enthuses Abnett. "Having watched them making it and watching the way James Gunn operates in terms of a director... he's got a good, funny, exciting story scripted, but I watched in the course of an afternoon as he took a scene and made a good scene even better by doing a number of different takes where he developed some of the spontaneous things the actors were doing, so it was very organic. There was something extraordinarily familiar about it, that it wasn't just characters who had the same name or had been adjusted for cinematic purposes; there was the mix of proper serious action and sort of in-universe naturalistic humour. You can see that in the trailer, the slightly irreverent nature to it."

It's not just Abnett who's impressed with the way Gunn has handled this property. Everyone at the House of Ideas, from Kevin Feige to Joss Whedon, has been effusive in their praise of the director, but a lot ➤



Chris Pratt's in full Han Solo-wannabe mode as Star-Lord.



The unapologetically fun-looking trailers have won many sceptics over.



GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY IS THE NEXT BIG THING, I FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT THAT

DAVE BAUTISTA

GUARDIANS ASSEMBLE!

Who's who in Guardians Of The Galaxy



**STAR-LORD/
PETER
QUILL**

ROLE: LEADER
ATTRIBUTES: QUICK-THINKING, BIG-MOUTHED CHANCER WITH AN EYE FOR THE LADIES AND A BIGGER HEART THAN HE LETS ON
PLAYED BY: CHRIS PRATT
As a man who has fully embraced his identity as an intergalactic rogue while being very much still rooted in the pop culture of the Eighties, Peter Quill is the kind of unlikely hero that Chris Pratt was born to play. It's the first step in Pratt's move into attaining fully fledged leading man status.



DRAX

ROLE: MUSCLE
ATTRIBUTES: BUILT LIKE A BRICK SKITHOUSE AND WITH A THIRST FOR REVENGE, YOU DO

NOT WANT TO GET IN HIS WAY
PLAYED BY: DAVE BAUTISTA
Drax the Destroyer might work with a lot less elegance than Gamora, but he gets the job done. He's a man of few words and mighty deeds, so the casting of WWE star Dave Bautista makes sense. The wrestler and sometime actor may not have the longest list of credits, but he impressed as heartless killer Bronze Body in the RZA's barking mad *The Man With The Iron Fists*, and he's definitely got the physique and thousand-yard stare.



GAMORA

ROLE: ASSASSIN
ATTRIBUTES: A DEADLY, HOT-TEMPERED ASSASSIN WITH A DARK PAST WHO

KNOWS EXACTLY HOW DANGEROUS SHE IS
PLAYED BY: ZOE SALDANA
After seeing her sidelined in *Star Trek Into Darkness*, it's great to see Saldana sink her teeth into the role of the self-proclaimed 'Deadliest woman in the whole galaxy'. The actress has played her share of cold-blooded badasses before in movies like *Colombiana* and, to an extent, *Avatar*, but it's her performance as stone-cold killer Aisha in *The Losers* that suggests that she's the perfect choice for Thanos' foster-daughter Gamora.



GROOT

ROLE: MUSCLE
ATTRIBUTES: WELL... HE'S A WALKING, TALKING TREE. THAT SHOULD

JUST ABOUT COVER IT
VOICED BY: VIN DIESEL
Rocket's partner in crime is Groot, a sentient tree-like being with the ability to walk, talk (well, he says "I am Groot") and wipe the floor with practically any number of bad guys. Somehow managing to be even stranger than a talking psychotic raccoon, Groot's generally benign nature, combined with the ability to throw down if need be, makes Vin Diesel the only choice when the time to cast voice actors came about. "I am Groot" indeed.



ROCKET

ROLE: ULTRA-VIOLENCE
ATTRIBUTES: WISE-CRACKING RACCOON WITH A PENCHANT FOR

KILLING EVERYTHING WITH A MACHINE GUN BIGGER THAN HE IS
VOICED BY: BRADLEY COOPER
If *Guardians* is going to have one breakout character, it'll be Rocket. There is nothing about him, from his hair-trigger temper to the fact that he's a talking raccoon, that isn't brilliant. There were plenty of rumours and fan wish lists for Rocket's voice, but James Gunn chose Bradley Cooper. Anyone who saw him in *American Hustle* and *Silver Linings Playbook* will know he's got manic intensity and mood swings down pat.

AND ON THE DARK SIDE...

LEE PACE IS RONAN THE ACCUSER

The *Pushing Daisies* and *The Hobbit* star plays the film's primary villain, a religious and deeply evil agent of Thanos who punishes the weak. Pace described the character to us as "a real psychopathic beast", and together with Nebula he'll make life very difficult for our heroes.

KAREN GILLAN IS NEBULA

The *Doctor Who* star leaves the Doctor-dependent Amy Pond behind to play blue-skinned assassin Nebula, who is seen slicing her way through the trailer. She claims that Thanos is her father – another reason for clashing with Gamora.

BENICIO DEL TORO IS THE COLLECTOR

Last seen during the end credits of *Thor: The Dark World* accepting the Aether gem from Lady Sif and Volstagg, Benicio del Toro's Collector is a bit of an unknown quality. He's not necessarily evil, but he's an obsessive lunatic who will put his own interests above the safety of others.

of moviegoers who will be shelling out for tickets to the latest Marvel extravaganza may not be too familiar with his work. His highest-profile gigs so far have been writing Zack Snyder's *Dawn Of The Dead* remake (arguably still that director's best work) and the *Scooby Doo* films. Genre fans, however, will know him as the director of hilarious creature feature *Slither* and razor-sharp superhero satire *Super* (and the writer of sillier superhero satire *The Specials*). It's not a surprise to hear that the irreverence Abnett talks about is very much present and correct. Summer tent-pole movies don't seem like the most natural place for improvisation, for example, but Bautista tells us that Gunn encouraged his stars to go off book.

"Tons, tons – we did a lot of that, man," he remembers. "James was really up for that, and he's not one of those directors who's just, 'You've got to stick by the script'; he was constantly throwing ideas at you, 'Say this,' 'Try it this way,' you'd get this over the loudspeaker. And it made for a lot of fun – a lot of fun. With Chris [Pratt] and Zoe [Saldana] being so witty, it just made for some really good scenes."

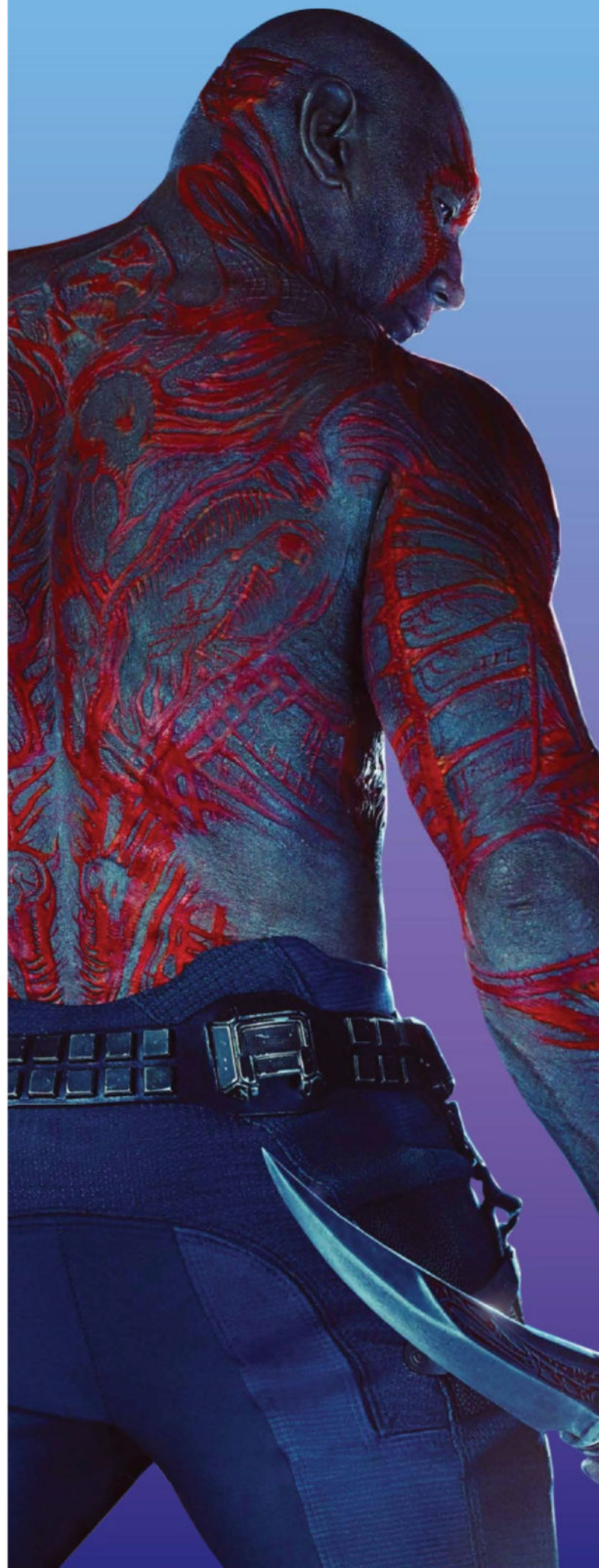
It's hard to imagine that much freedom being offered up on a film where there were a lot of nerves. The laid-back, spontaneity-friendly atmosphere on set is almost certainly due to the fact that Gunn

put a similar level of effort and deliberation into choosing his cast and their dynamic as Abnett and Lanning did in choosing their line-up. Pratt is still best known for playing *Parks And Recreation*'s loveable doofus Andy Dwyer, but he's on the cusp of becoming an A-list leading man, with *Jurassic World* on the horizon, while Saldana has been quietly doing overlooked work in overblown blockbusters for years.

IT'S AWESOME, AND IT MAKES FOR A LOT OF FUN," EXPLAINS BAUTISTA OF THE GROUP INTERACTION. "A LOT OF GOOD LAUGHS AND A LOT OF GOOD DRAMA AS WELL, IT WAS REALLY

cool, man. Because James Gunn, he told me this, he really was looking for the chemistry within the cast. He was real particular about who he wanted for this movie, because he wanted the cast to have a great chemistry. They needed that for this film to work and be successful, and it couldn't be any better. It really was a total family atmosphere, and it was so much fun coming to work every day. It was not easy; these were long, long days, man – a lot of make-up, but it was just so much fun. It just flew by."

In fact, the more you looked at *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, the more that 'riskiest blockbuster' label looked like a misnomer. We might not have seen these characters before – indeed, a lot of filmgoers will never



Pratt has signed a multi-picture deal with Marvel.



Zoe Saldana takes on yet another ass-kicking role as Gamora.

MEET THE DESTROYER

Dave Bautista tells us why Drax the Destroyer is the role of a lifetime...

After providing muscle for self-aware B-movies *The Man With The Iron Fists* and *Riddick*, ex-wrestler Dave Bautista has entered the big leagues to play *Guardians Of The Galaxy*'s vengeful but big-hearted Drax the Destroyer. Not only was *Guardians* Marvel's opportunity to show off a new side of themselves, this is Bautista's chance to prove himself as an actor, as the star explains...

How much did you know about Guardians before you went to audition?

Well, I was actually just given the sides when I auditioned for Drax. So I wasn't completely familiar with the rest of the characters, and the more I tried to research Drax – which wasn't easy to do – I became familiar with the other Guardians. I was totally confused the first time I got the sides for Drax; I just didn't get him at all. With him being so literal and everything, even the way he speaks, I'm from the streets, man – I speak like I'm from the streets – I just couldn't relate; it was rough.

Once you got a handle on him, it must have been a pretty exciting role to get your teeth into.

Oh man, it was great. This was a dream role for me, and it was something that I really needed. Not wanted; I needed this. Even more than I wanted it, because I left behind wrestling, which was my bread and butter, because I wanted to become an actor, and not just a guy who was in movies. I fell in love with acting, and it was really hard to get people to take me seriously, coming from the wrestling background. So it wasn't easy, and with Drax being such an emotional rollercoaster, it gave me the opportunity to really show an acting range, and not just be the big tough guy who kicks down doors, shoots people, says a tough one-liner and calls it a day.

Was it quite a long audition process?

It was. It was not only going back for audition after audition and screen tests, but this went on for months, and they didn't exclude me for the part, but they didn't confirm me! Then we got into reading all the internet rumours, and it was just very stressful, because like I said, I needed this even more than I wanted it. My career had got to that point where I'd been away from wrestling for four years, and I'd gone for four years without making a decent paycheck, but I still had all the same bills coming in, and I wasn't getting any younger, then to be breaking into acting in your 40s and to be walking away from what has been your career for the last 15 years, it's not an easy thing to do. So it was a make-or-break situation, and it was really dire straits.



"DRAX HAS GOT A HEART OF GOLD UNDER ALL THE GREEN AND TATTOOS, SCARS, SKULLS AND WHATNOT"

DAVE BAUTISTA

How did you get on with James Gunn?

Oh man, besides him just making everything really fun, he also made everything really easy. He knew exactly what he wanted, he had this vision, and he made it very easy for everyone. He also gave everybody a lot of freedom. I clicked with him right off the bat, right at the audition, he's just got this way of making you feel very relaxed. There's nothing pretentious about him, man; he's

just a regular guy, and he makes you feel right at home and really comfortable. That's what kind of made this very easy for me, because it was very intimidating. You know, I'm stepping on set with some of the biggest names in Hollywood now, but everyone just made it so much fun. I hate to keep throwing that word around over and over, but it really was. It was such a joy making this movie, man.

It must have been quite strange acting opposite two characters – Groot and Rocket – who weren't there.

Obviously the animated characters were not there, but we did have awesome, incredible actors as stand-ins. Sean Gunn, I want to mention him because I had a lot of scenes with Rocket, and Sean is such an incredibly talented actor. He was so absorbed into this role – even as a stand-in – that he brought out the best in everybody. It's very easy to be in the moment with a guy who's that talented.

What do you think Drax brings?

Drax is constantly described as being out for revenge, but I try to describe him as being a character who is really more heartbroken than anything. The tragic loss of his family, they didn't just die; they were murdered. He's just heartbroken, and that's where his revenge stems from. But Drax has got a heart of gold under all the green and tattoos, scars, skulls and whatnot; he's actually a really decent noble human being. Well, not human being obviously; person, alien!

How did you get on with the green make-up and the scars?

It wasn't so bad; I'm a very patient person. I kind of have this zen thing where I can just zone out for hours, so it wasn't so bad. But, one or two days, fine; three days, it's OK; four days, it starts getting a little rough; five days, it's getting a little itchy, and when you do six days in a row it just starts to become... you've really got to zone out and be patient, because your skin starts to get dry. It's itchy, it's peeling and painful, you get more sensitive, and it feels like you're not standing there for four hours anymore; you're standing there for ten hours! And you're sweating inside the make-up, and it's just getting gross! It was a little uncomfortable, it tested my patience.

ROCKET & GROOT: STEAL THE GALAXY!

James Gunn wasn't the only one to recognise the importance of Dan Abnett to *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, as Marvel have drafted him in to write their first original prose novel about two of the film's guaranteed scene stealers: *Rocket Raccoon & Groot: Steal The Galaxy!*

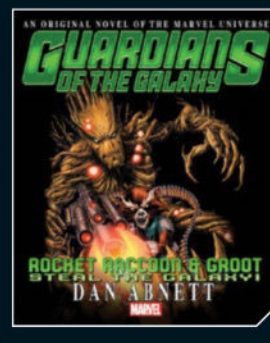
"It came about at short notice, and there's no shame in admitting that Marvel were sitting there thinking, 'What other *Guardians*-related things can we produce to tie into the event halo which surrounds the release of the movie?'" laughs Abnett. "And Marvel Publishing came to me and said 'We know that when you're not writing comics you write novels; would you like to write a Rocket and Groot novel?'"

Typically, Marvel tie-in novels are adaptations of classic comics, but Abnett was only interested in an original story. "I think things are written very much for the medium in which they're presented," he tells us, "particularly with Rocket and Groot and the cosmic material. I thought there were different approaches. It's a very fast-paced, action-packed adventure, as you would expect – it has got a high degree of humour in it."

Abnett is particularly pleased that he managed to make it accessible for newcomers while packing it full of references for the initiated. "If you only know *Guardians* because of the movie, you will be able to understand it completely. If you were a comics fan, you will get all the in-jokes, some of which are just put in there for sheer gleeful fun."

If you're not won over by these two getting a standalone story, allow Abnett to sum up its appeal. "At the end of my pitch I said, 'What I'm proposing doing here is John Woo's *Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy!*'" Sold.

Rocket Raccoon & Groot: Steal The Galaxy! is available 15 July.



WONDERS OF THE UNIVERSE

LIKE THE BIG BANG, THE MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE KEEPS EXPANDING

AGENT CARTER

CAST: HAYLEY ATWELL, DOMINIC COOPER
SHOWRUNNERS: TARA BUTTERS, MICHELE FAZEKAS
RELEASED: JANUARY 2015

Hayley Atwell has recently starred as the eponymous heroine in the eight episode series that ABC aired during Season Two of *Agents Of SHIELD*. Dominic Cooper returned as the charming and smarmy Howard Stark, along with some well-loved Howling Commandos. They are currently airing the second season as we type.

ANT-MAN

CAST: PAUL RUDD, MICHAEL DOUGLAS, EVANGELINE LILLY, PATRICK WILSON, MICHAEL PEÑA **DIRECTOR:** PEYTON REED **RELEASED:** 17 JULY 2015

It was the next 'riskiest Marvel movie' and it took a big hit when Edgar Wright left the project after eight years working on it. *Bring It On's* Peyton Reed stepped in as his replacement. The cast, led by Paul Rudd as Scott Lang and Michael Douglas as Dr Hank Pym, the film became an unexpected hit, with plenty of good humour, remnants of Wright's script, and a giant Thomas The Tank Engine.

BEYOND THE AVENGERS

The Russo brothers have returned to direct *Captain America 3: Civil War*, with Robert Downey Jr in attendance, Spider-Man will be web-slinging into action in the sequel. Thor will return in 2017, entitled *Thor: Ragnarok*. Also added to the slate are *Captain Marvel*, *Black Panther* and *Inhumans* as well as, another, *Spider-Man* reboot this time in the MCU.

AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON

CAST: ROBERT DOWNEY JR, CHRIS EVANS, CHRIS HEMSWORTH, SCARLETT JOHANSSON **DIRECTOR:** JOSS WHEDON
RELEASED: 24 APRIL 2015

Age Of Ultron hit cinemas causing quite a mixed reaction, most people loved it. It gave added depth to Hawkeye and Black Widow (who had previously been hideously under-used), added more layers to the MCU universe – Avenger's HQ anyone?! – and somebody else was worthy of the power of Thor.

NETFLIX

DAREDEVIL

CAST: CHARLIE COX, VINCENT D'ONOFRIO
SHOWRUNNER: STEVEN S DEKNIGHT
RELEASED: APRIL 2015

After a brilliant and gritty first series, *Daredevil* solidified itself a second streaming series later this year.

JESSICA JONES

CAST: KRYSTEN RITTER, DAVID TENNANT
SHOWRUNNER: MELISSA ROSENBERG
RELEASED: NOVEMBER 2015

It hit Netflix and we were hooked. In love with the hero turned PI with a haunted past, we look forward to season two.

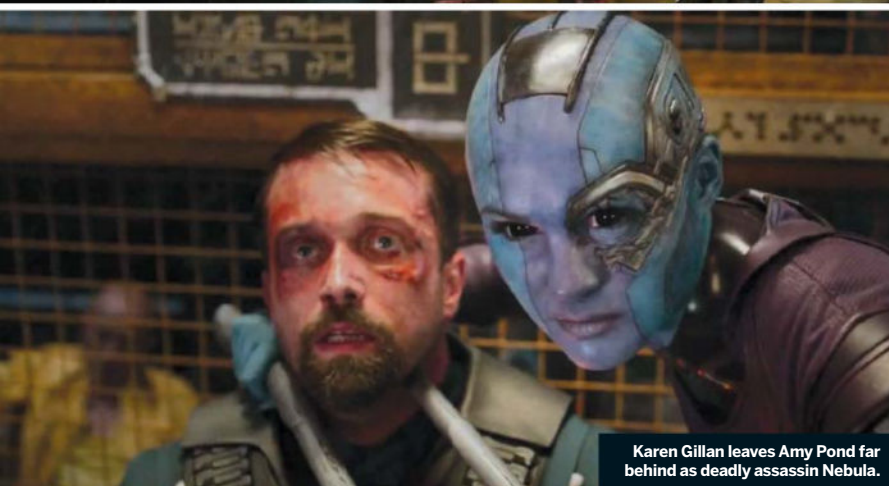
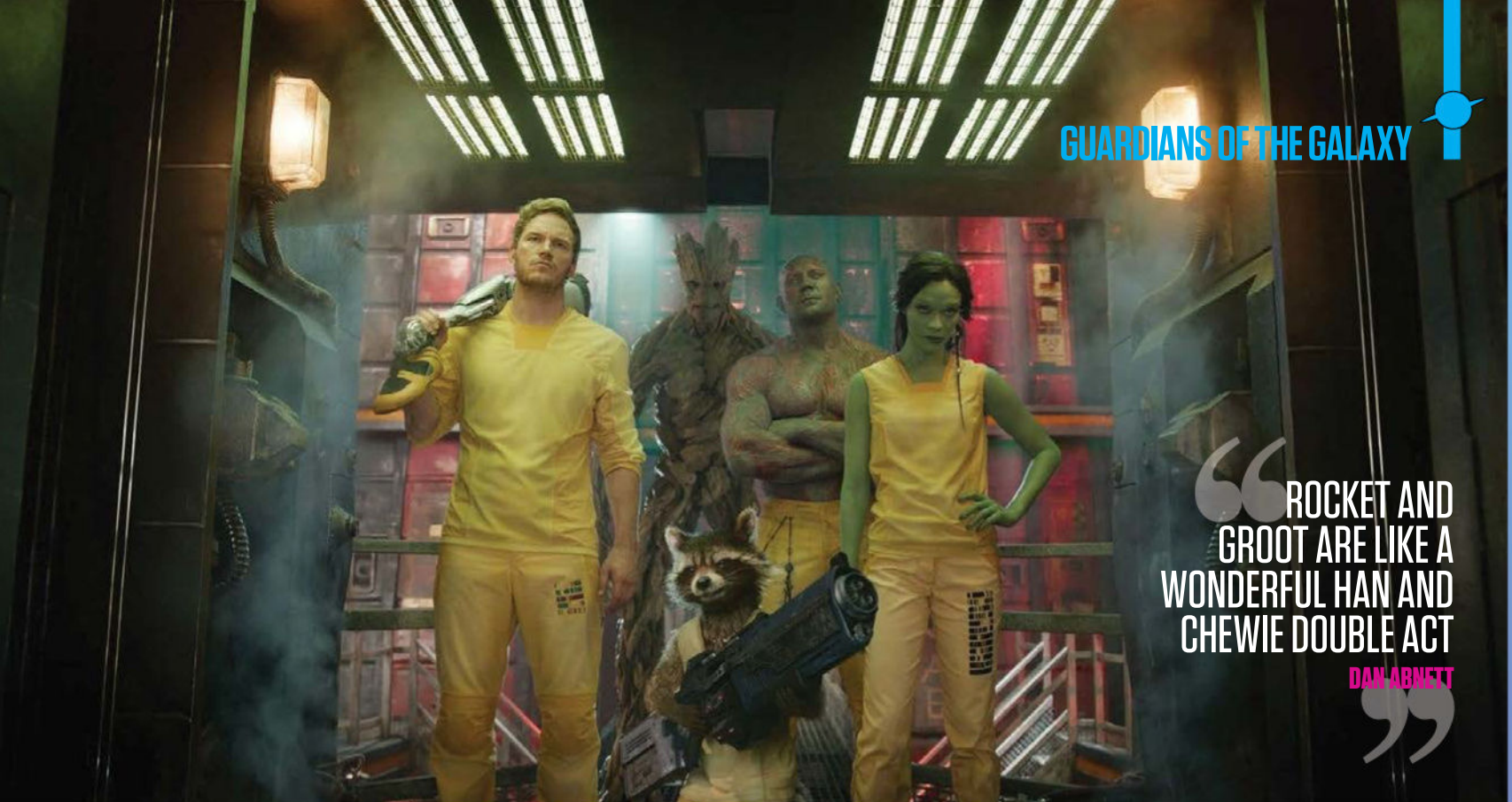
DOCTOR STRANGE

CAST: BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH, RACHEL MCADAMS, TILDA SWINTON
DIRECTOR: SCOTT DERRICKSON **RELEASED:**

Marvel has finally delivered on its promise to bring Doctor Strange to the big screen, and has chosen a director. Following that little tease in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, *Sinister's* Scott Derrickson will bring Marvel's Master of the Mystic Arts to life. Benedict Cumberbatch has been cast, unsurprisingly, as the leading man. Time will tell how good a choice it is.

“ROCKET AND GROOT ARE LIKE A WONDERFUL HAN AND CHEWIE DOUBLE ACT

DAN ABNETT



Karen Gillan leaves Amy Pond far behind as deadly assassin Nebula.



➤ have heard of them before – but the same can be said of many of Marvel’s heroes. After all, what percentage of people who saw *Thor* were fans of the comic-book character? When we put the risk question to Bautista, it gets a firm response.

“No, we didn’t think that way at all in terms of it being a risk,” he tells us. “I know that term came up a lot, and I think it’s really just because of the fear of the unknown. I think it’s hard to get an audience to be sucked into something they’re really unfamiliar with, and that was kind of the challenge. Not that being risky isn’t a part of a good quality product, but we never felt that way on set, because we knew how good it was. We were more excited, like we can’t wait to share it with everybody because it’s that good. It’s the next big thing, I feel strongly about that, and I think everybody who was involved in this, even the Marvel bigwigs, I think they’re excited about this.”

Those Marvel bigwigs have been very canny over the last few years, moving in

leaps and bounds ahead of their competitors to create a coherent universe of franchises within franchises without alienating their audiences. The Marvel logo that sits above the movie’s title will almost certainly be as much of a draw as the brilliant trailer, and Abnett tells us that *Guardians* represents not only a clever business move on their part, but an essential storytelling one.

THINK IT’S MARVEL BEING EXTREMELY SMART IN THE MOVIE-MAKING DEPARTMENT AND SEEING OPPORTUNITIES. FOR INSTANCE, BY MAKING GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY, THEY COMPLETELY

opened up the cosmic toybox and everything that’s related to that, so that gives them enormous amounts of opportunity to develop other things within it,” Abnett explains. “And it also shows that they’re not afraid to go forth with some of the lesser-known characters, which again opens up all those secondary and tertiary level heroes, many of whom are fantastic; they’re just not as famous as the big ones.”



Still, just like *Thor* and *Iron Man*, the *Guardians* will be on the map as soon as the film comes out. Few studios have been as successful at providing audiences with characters they didn’t know that they loved, and it’s hard to believe that *Guardians* will be the exception to that. “It’s something that people are not familiar with, but they’re going to be familiar with it after the movie comes out, and I think that they’re going to crave more, and they’re going to want to see more from these characters, man, because they’re awesome,” enthuses Bautista.

“It’s just the sheer boldness of saying, ‘Your next Marvel movie will feature a talking raccoon and a walking tree. Get used to it,’” laughs Abnett. “People have either gone, ‘Ah no, they’ve jumped the shark,’ or, ‘That’s so cool! Where are the toys?’”

Guardians Of The Galaxy is available on Blu-ray now.



size matters not

We spoke to director Peyton Reed to find out why you should give Ant-Man a chance, and how it ties in to Marvel's Phase Three...



WHEN DIRECTOR EDGAR WRIGHT LEFT ANT-MAN WELL INTO PRODUCTION IN MAY LAST YEAR, IT WAS KIND OF A BIG DEAL. AFTER EXPLAINING THE reason was due to “creative differences”, fans that had been following the film’s progress went into meltdown. Some announced they would be boycotting it, and Joss Whedon tweeted a solemn picture of himself holding up a Cornetto Mint in solidarity with Wright. It was a blow, considering he had been working on the film passionately since 2006.

It wasn’t long before Marvel Studios announced his replacement in the form of *Bring It On* director Peyton Reed, but many still weren’t convinced. Although his filmography doesn’t exactly showcase it, Reed has as much geek credibility as anyone. We spoke to the director to find out why *Ant-Man* was the project he’d been waiting for.

“I’ve done mostly comedies, but I’ve wanted to do a big superhero/science fiction movie for a very long time,” he tells us. “They’re the types of movies that made me want to make movies as a kid in the first place. So to have the opportunity to do it, I think I was primed and ready, and when I came aboard, I flew to Atlanta and soaked everything in. I read all the drafts of the scripts, immediately started working with the writers and storyboard artists, and just hit the ground running, which is kind of the case on every movie. But on this one, a gigantic movie with a lot of technical components to it that had to be corralled very quickly... Fortunately, one of the great things about working at Marvel is in every department across the board, you’re supported by people

Crosby

ANT TESTIMONIAL

“I don’t know him too well as I only have a lifespan of 45 to 60 days, but he seems like an okay guy.”

Stills

ANT TESTIMONIAL

“The endoskeleton freaks me out a bit.”



The *Dark Knight*'s David Dastmalchian features in the cast.

who are at the top of their game. It’s been an amazing experience.”

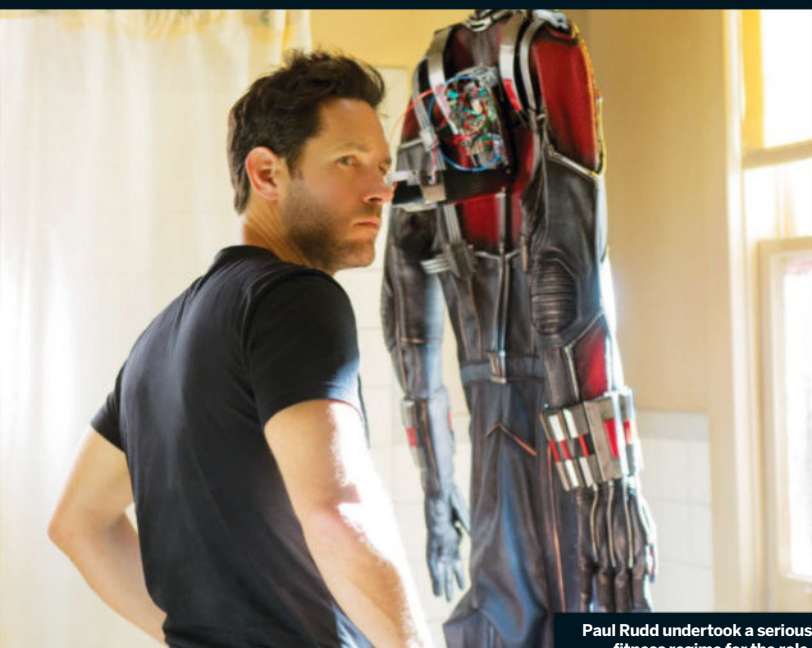
As someone who grew up mentally living in the Marvel universe, Reed finds the idea of the MCU, and the fact that everything crosses over into other films, incredibly exciting. With Hayley Atwell (Agent Peggy Carter) and John Slattery (Howard Stark) set to reprise their roles in *Ant-Man*, Reed seems to be taking full advantage of the fact.

“One of the things I love about the MCU is how it parallels the Marvel comics universe. As a kid, I used to love reading a *Fantastic Four* issue and seeing some of the Avengers show up, or reading *Spider-Man* and seeing the Hulk show up,” Reed says.

“I loved that cross-pollination, so for me, I don’t think of [the crossovers] as a Marvel mandate. What I love about Hank Pym is in the movie, Michael Douglas is Hank Pym in the history

of the Marvel universe. You’ll get to see Hank Pym and get a sense of his history as Ant-Man before Scott Lang came in. You’ll also get a sense of how he feels about the Starks, the Avengers and those sorts of characters. He was one of the cornerstone characters in the comics, so I love bringing that stuff in.

“There’s probably a point you could reach where you bring too much of that stuff in, because this movie absolutely lives and dies on its own. It’s its own, self-contained Ant-Man origin story, it’s got a beginning, a middle and an end, but I also like that it can weave in these other elements of the universe and be part of this wider world. To me, that was one of the most appealing things about doing a Marvel movie, because I think it’s something we take for granted now, how the MCU works, but it really was kind of a grand experiment when it first



Paul Rudd undertook a serious fitness regime for the role.



Ant-Man sees Michael Douglas’s Hank Pym play mentor to Rudd’s Scott Lang.



The crazy world of Ant-Man

Fans of the *Ant-Man* comics will know that Hank Pym can be far from a hero. During a pretty controversial storyline, he actually hit his wife Janet Van Dyne (aka Wasp), making him the first high-profile wife beater of the comics world. Van Dyne divorced Pym after he became abusive, as did the Avengers.

Here are some other times Ant-Man went off the rails...

When he was part of the Avengers, Hank Pym's emotional instability caused him to feel inadequate in mind and body compared to the rest of the team. Instead of talking it out, he created a new kind of Pym Particle that turned him into Giant-Man.



Pym once used his incredible shrinking powers in the bedroom with Janet Van Dyne. We won't go into too much detail, but it involved shrinking down to size, climbing into 'something', performing various 'activities', and then making his way back to Janet's face by scurrying up her cleavage. It was quite strange.



The second incarnation of Ant-Man, Scott Lang, is an ex-con with a shady past. Those aren't the best credentials for a superhero, but a stint in prison helped Lang see the error of his ways and start using his, ahem, certain set of skills, to help others.



The third man to don the Ant-Man suit, Eric O'Grady, could also be a bit of a bastard. He was working as a low-level SHIELD agent when he stumbled across the suit at SHIELD headquarters. He stole it, cheated and lied his way to becoming a 'hero', and used his new guise to stalk women and steal some more. His comic-book series was called *The Irredeemable Ant-Man*, which also says a lot.



started. There was a point where they were like, 'Is this going to work?' and it absolutely worked. If you look at last year, *Winter Soldier* and *Guardians Of The Galaxy* came out. I love both those movies, and they are radically different tones, so I love that there is a cinematic universe where both of these movies can exist, be their own specific tones and have their own idiosyncrasies, but they work within the wider universe, and I think *Ant-Man* is absolutely a part of it."

A funny thing about *Ant-Man* is that for a long time, nobody really knew where it was going to fit into the MCU. It could have been Phase 2; that would have made sense. Conversely, with it being a story about a new character that we haven't seen on the big screen before, it could also comfortably kick-start the upcoming string of Phase 3 movies. Either way, the story

is definitely going to be affected by the events of *Avengers: Age Of Ultron*.

"I think you'll see certain characters and their attitudes about what's gone on before, and that's one of the fun things [about *Ant-Man*]," says Reed. "But at the same time, Scott Lang is very different. He doesn't have superpowers. He's just a normal guy. He's made some terrible decisions in his life, he's coming out of prison, and he's just a guy looking to get his life back on track. He's divorced, has a daughter that he hasn't seen, and he's dying to get back into his daughter's life, but he's also tempted by some things that may not be in his best interests. Then he comes across this suit, and he gets sucked into this world that's a much larger world and a much more Marvel world that he did not know existed. So that's kind of a fun thing about this movie: it's a different way into this universe of superheroes.

HANK PYM IS A BIT OF A SCREWED UP MENTOR
PEYTON REED



"It's funny, because working here, you each have these hallways, and everyone's on their mission to get their movie done, so I'll pass by Scott Derrickson in the morning: 'How's *Doctor Strange* going?' And then James Gunn will pop around, and he's working on *Guardians 2*, and I'll run into Joss [Whedon], who was deep into post-production on *Age Of Ultron* as we were in post-production on *Ant-Man*, and Joss quite frankly would look pretty exhausted – you've seen the movie, it's a gigantic movie. It's kind of fun to go to work in the morning and see all these people who are working on their specific part... It's been nice, because it's very rare that directors get to hang out together, so when you do get these moments in the hallway, you can talk, share war stories and support each other, I love that. It's awesome."

THE FACT THAT ANT-MAN IS A RELATIVELY UNKNOWN SUPERHERO COMPARED TO THE BIG MCU PLAYERS LIKE IRON MAN, CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THOR GAVE REED and the production team more wiggle room and freedom to make him into what they wanted him to be.

"Because Ant-Man is a lesser-known character, people come to it with less pre-conceived notions," he admits. "And probably if they have any notions of Ant-Man, it's 'Okay, wait a second, he can shrink? What's his other power? He can control ants?! How can that be cool? How can that possibly be useful in any situation that a superhero may face?' One of the coolest things about the movie, and the thing I'm most proud of, is it absolutely shows you how, when properly mobilised, these armies of ants can do some real damage.

"I like any science fiction movie that has an internal structure and internal politics. As a kid, I was a big *Planet Of The Apes* fan, and I was obsessed with the political hierarchy of the orang-utans, chimpanzees and gorillas. I was so obsessed with that politics. *Ant-Man*'s version of that is we introduce all these ant characters. There's the carpenter ants, the bullet ants, the crazy ants, the fire ants – they're all real ants that exist in nature, and they all have very specific skill sets. One of the things about this movie is how Hank and Scott are able to use these skill sets and amass these ants for various elements of the heist, and I think that's one of the secret elements of the movie."

Back when Edgar Wright was still directing, when *Ant-Man* news got



It's fair to say that *Ant-Man* will be like no other superhero movie you've seen before.

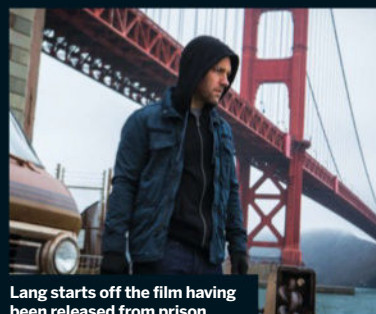


Dusty

ANT TESTIMONIAL

"I walked in on him and his wife once. I can never un-see it."

Adversarial duties are taken on by Corey Stoll as Darren Cross.



Lang starts off the film having been released from prison.



Redemption will be a core theme – for both Hank and Scott.

presenting a different version of Paul Rudd; he's still the charming Paul Rudd and the funny Paul Rudd, but he's also a character who you meet at the beginning of the movie, coming out of prison. And so Paul has a very different rugged quality to him in the movie as well, and I think that's going to be cool for audiences to see.

"The top characters were already cast when I arrived on the movie, and it would have been disastrous if the casting had been terrible, but fortunately it was really great. You have Paul, Evangeline Lilly [Hope Van Dyne] and Corey Stoll [Darren Cross, aka villain Yellowjacket], and Michael Douglas [Hank Pym]. To me, the chance to work with Michael was amazing... When we were working on the rewrites, Michael and I agreed that we wanted to bring out a little of the grey area

of the Hank Pym character. In the comic-books, Hank is an extremely complicated character, and we wanted to bring out some of that... Michael has made an incredible career [around playing] morally ambiguous characters that have a lot of grey areas... Hank Pym is a mentor, but he's a little bit of a screwed up mentor. He clearly bears the mark of his time as Ant-Man, and he's motivated, in no small part, by guilt. He has a little bit of a quick temper, and it's interesting to see a character who's supposed to be a mentor to this other guy, but he has some serious issues of his own that he has to deal with... For me, to see Michael Douglas and to be able to direct Michael Douglas as Hank Pym was fantastic."

For a while, one of Ant-Man's main selling points was the fact that it was going to be an Edgar Wright film. His

➤ fans excited rather than angry in the YouTube comments section, most were pretty psyched about the universally liked Paul Rudd being cast as the film's star. When Reed finally joined the film last year, he was pretty psyched too.

"I'd known Paul for a couple of years, but we'd never worked together. But Paul, as I'm sure you've seen in the photographs, got into insanely great physical shape for the role; rippling six pack abs, and also did fight training for the role. One of the things that excites me most about [the movie] is

Silver

ANT TESTIMONIAL

"He's all right, but I think he's been stealing my lunch from the communal fridge."

and Joe Cornish's screenplay was a source of excitement, but sadly a lot of people decided they had beef with the film once he left. When Reed joined as director, Rudd and *Anchorman*'s Adam McKay rewrote the script. But how similar is Reed's movie to Wright and Cornish's original screenplay?

"The whole notion of [Wright and Cornish's] idea of making it a heist movie structure, that's still absolutely part of the DNA of the movie," reveals Reed. "So the basic heist structure is the same, but we changed a great deal. We've tried to keep the spirit of the movie, but in the evolution of it, there were things where Adam McKay and Paul came aboard to write the new draft, and Adam, who we all know is hilarious, is also a massive Marvel comics nerd as well. Adam and I had some ideas of the movie that were like, 'It would be cool to bring this in,' and 'What if we also did this, and what if when we get to the third act instead of doing this,' and it all fed off itself."

AS EACH TRAILER WAS UNVEILED, THE FAN REACTION BECAME PROGRESSIVELY MORE POSITIVE. HOWEVER, SOME WERE STILL UPSET ABOUT THE LACK OF WASP.

"It's interesting, and this goes back to when the first *Iron Man* and *Ant-Man* scripts were written – probably 2007 or 2008 – when Edgar and Joe first started writing, that was the decision they made when they started writing the script: that they wanted to do more of a Hank Pym/Scott Lang mentor/pupil thing that had a heist element to it. And I know that because Edgar and Joe were developing it for so long, there was a point where Joss wanted to maybe include Ant-Man and Wasp in the original *Avengers*, but they couldn't because of what was being developed for *Ant-Man*, so that's just sort of the way it worked out, but I would urge fans of Ant-Man and Wasp to go see the movie, and I'll leave it at that!"

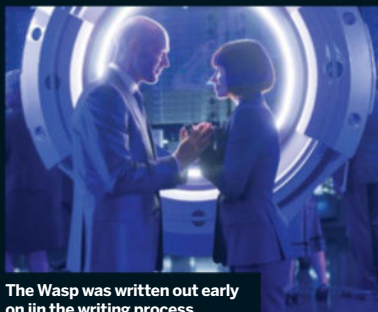
Though production had been rocky, *Ant-Man* was very likely to do well at the box office; after all, it's an MCU movie, how could it not? And it won't be long until Rudd gets a second airing, what with him already confirmed to be appearing in *Captain America: Civil War*.

"It's been an exciting thing, certainly for myself, and also for Paul, that Ant-Man is going to be a part of this ongoing universe, and when you see the movie, I think you're going to come out of *Ant-Man* saying, 'I want to see more of this guy, I like this character and I like

I CAN'T WAIT FOR THE FANS TO DISCOVER THIS CHARACTER

PEYTON REED

Former *Lost* star Evangeline Lilly plays Hank's daughter, Hope.

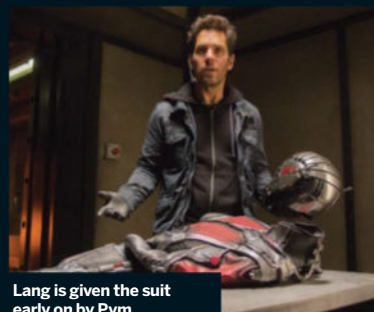


The Wasp was written out early on in the writing process.

his take on everything that's going on around him.' There's clearly a lot more to explore with this character, not only when you see the movie you'll feel that way, but also knowing his history in the comics, there's so much to explore with these [guys], with Scott Lang, with Hank Pym, and with Hope as well.

"I can't wait for fans to discover this character. That's one of the things to me about not doing a sequel... I have the privilege, really, of creating this new character, and this cinematic version of this comic-book character that the die-hard fans know, but the general public at large probably doesn't know. To me, it's like, 'Come and sit down for a two-hour period, go on this ride and experience this movie.' 🐜

Ant-Man is available to buy on Blu-ray and DVD now.



Lang is given the suit early on by Pym.

Director Peyton Reed is hopeful about the chances of a sequel.



Prince

ANT TESTIMONIAL

"He's great! He's like the drone I never had. We're all one big, happy superorganism."

Nash

ANT TESTIMONIAL

"We used to be really good mates, but then he tried to ride me into battle once and it got a bit weird between us."



DEADPOOL'S COMING

HE'S FINALLY READY FOR YOU. WE TAKE A LOOK AT WHY TIM MILLER'S FILM COULDN'T HAVE FAILED, AND SPEAK TO DEADPOOL COMIC CREATOR, WRITER AND ARTIST ROB LIEFELD ABOUT WHAT'S COMING UP FOR THE MERC WITH A MOUTH...

AFTER TEETERING IN PRODUCTION LIMBO FOR ALMOST A DECADE, TIM MILLER'S DEADPOOL DIDN'T BEGIN TO GATHER SPEED UNTIL SAN DIEGO COMIC-CON IN 2014.

When a graphic novel series is loved as much as this one is, even the smallest of mistakes – a misjudged tone, off casting, unusual costumes, anything – can send any superhero movie straight to the DVD bargain bin. As a personality, Deadpool is probably one of the more memorable in the world of Marvel, which is why so many people love him. But one wrong move (or movie) could ruin it forever. Which is why we were totally with the long-time fans for fretting over the tiniest of details: it won't be funny enough, it won't be violent enough. Why are they casting Ryan Reynolds *again*? Do they not remember *X-Men: Origins*? It could only ever go very well or very badly.

Then 2014's San Diego Comic-Con happened. Test footage for the film was presented during the *Deadpool* panel, and attendees had a good time while the rest of the world ground their teeth enviously. Then someone – no one really knows who – leaked the footage online, and it was nothing short of glorious. That someone, whoever it was, is now a hero. Some spread rumours that it might have been Tim Miller himself. Miller wondered if it was Ryan Reynolds. But that doesn't matter anymore. All three minutes of the footage were spectacular. It featured a motion-capture performance from

Reynolds, but his Wade Wilson voice and mannerisms were mesmerising, the suit was one of the best superhero suit designs we'd ever seen, and the tone was absolutely spot-on. It was gory, funny and amazing. Thanks to that one bit of leaked footage and the overwhelming reaction it provoked, Tim Miller's vision for *Deadpool* forced Fox to take it more seriously. The film was fast-tracked, more people got involved, and now we can pretty much reach out and touch it. So whoever it was who leaked that clip, we thank you.

A year and a half later, the footage is almost impossible to track down, but that doesn't matter. We've had trailers! Featurettes and in-character clips! We salivate as we wait for the Blu-ray! No matter what Fox puts out, we lap it up. It's all note-perfect, and it's all the Merc with a Mouth we wanted to see. That could be partly down to *Deadpool* creator Rob Liefeld's involvement. He didn't write the film, provide the storyline or anything like that, but he's definitely had some influence. He's been involved with the *Deadpool* film from as far back as 2009, and communicated with everyone from producer Lauren

The Deadpool Bible

Where to start with the Merc's comics



New Mutants Vol 1 #98
Year: 1991
Writers: Rob Liefeld, Fabian Nicieza

The Merc with a Mouth's first appearance is a doozy. It's also where many fans fell in love with the assassin almost 25 years ago. Find out where it all began.



Deadpool / Death Annual '98
Year: 1998
Writer: Joe Kelly

A kiss, a curse, a cure... In this one-off annual, Deadpool looks back on his time in the hospice and his ongoing love affair with Death. A must-read.



Deadpool Vol 2 #33
Year: October 1999
Writer: Joe Kelly

Space! The Final Frontier... these are the voyages of everyone's favourite killer-for-hire. Everything ends up being so much more difficult when there's no atmosphere.



Cable & Deadpool #31
Year: 2006
Writer: Fabian Nicieza

Deadpool goes up against the renegade heroes while Cable is busy running two countries. Or does he? Maybe he wants to use the Registration Act for his own gain...



Deadpool Vol 4 #6
Year: 2002
Writers: Brian Posehn, Gerry Duggan

When SHIELD adds Deadpool to their team, they are pretty sure they are going to regret it. It's not long before he declares a one-man war on the world peacekeeping agency.

➤ Schuler Donner and her crew, and executive producers Rhett Reese and Paul Mernick, to Tim Miller and Deadpool himself, Ryan Reynolds.

"They've been very kind and generous in sharing the experience with me." Liefeld tells us. "That said, and let me be clear in giving credit where it's due, I'm not a filmmaker. This is their film and their vision – and it's spectacular – but they were above and beyond in always keeping me in the loop, especially once Tim came on board."

A fair few comic-book movies have managed to impact their source material, even within the field of adaptations: Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy turned Batman into a rock star. Gone were the colourful, campy characters we knew from the Sixties TV series and film interpretations like Tim Burton's *Batman Returns*.

Fans of this particular genre are known for liking the adaptations to stay true to their sources as much as possible. Unnecessary internet outrage over deviations, like Michael B Jordan being cast as Johnny Storm in the *Fantastic Four* movie, prove this. His race isn't relevant to either the storyline or his character, so the change didn't actually matter, but people still cared because it was something different from the stories they'd grown up reading and they were unwilling to adapt. But with *Batman*, the change – making the story darker and grittier – really paid off. Nolan managed to redefine what we expect from superhero movies, and inform all of Warner Bros' DC titles still to come.

But with a *Deadpool* adaptation, grittiness is a definite no. The darkness can stay, but grittiness could be enough to ruin it entirely, and turn off any potential new comic fans. Tortured stares, hero angst and sincerity wouldn't suit Deadpool in any universe, which is no doubt why many were worried about the prospect of a new, big-budget take on Wade Wilson. But what we saw in trailers and in-character video clips showed us that Miller, Reynolds and the rest of the cast and crew have really captured what's *Deadpool's* about. It's funny, stylish, violent, naughty, and what everyone was waiting for. More importantly, it has Liefeld's endorsement: "What I can say is that they beyond nailed it," he says. That's good enough for us.

"I love [Miller and Reynolds], and they have championed *Deadpool* all these years, never gave up, and when finally given the chance have delivered a movie that exceeds all expectations. I firmly

believe this will transform the comic book film as we know it.

"The movie benefits from every daring move that they made. They went for the R rating, the graphic content, the outlandish humour... it sets the entire experience apart. There's Deadpool as you've known him, and then there's Ryan Reynolds in a *Deadpool* film, and I can't contain my enthusiasm. This will define Deadpool just as Robert Downey Jr defined Iron Man for a generation. This will be the ultimate *Deadpool*!"

The next huge concern about the film (and we do mean *huge*) was the age certificate. Going for a hard R rating could be considered a bit of a risk on Miller's part. Superhero movies rarely do well when a lot of its audience isn't old enough to see it. Just look at *Dredd*. But on the other hand, setting the certificate at a cleaner PG-13 would have been a risk – as Ryan Reynolds joked it was on April Fool's Day last year. What would that have meant for Deadpool? Would he have had to have been as squeaky clean as Captain America? Would he have been like Spider-Man, but older and with a slightly more colourful vocabulary? That, of course, would never have worked in the eyes of the people who have been with Deadpool for a long time. So what's more important: making sure as many people as possible will see your



Deadpool is always ready for a gun fight.





**“TIM MILLER AND
RYAN REYNOLDS HAVE
DELIVERED A MOVIE
THAT HAS EXCEEDED
ALL EXPECTATIONS”**
ROB LIEFELD

Will Wade's love interest
Vanessa (Morena Baccarin)
become Copycat?

movie, or making sure the character lives up to what the graphic novel fans want to see?

By keeping as close to the original character as possible, maybe more people will realise that yes, Deadpool is something they need more of in their lives, and new readers will be spawned without the fear of disappointment when the comics turn out to be completely different to the film that drew them in the first place. Miller made a good call.

After cracking into the early *Deadpool* comics, you'd be forgiven for thinking that Liefeld and writer Fabian Nicieza co-created *Deadpool* way back in 1991, especially considering Nicieza scripted the graphic novel while Liefeld thought up the story and provided the artwork, but that's actually a false assumption. Almost everything you know and think about Deadpool is down to Liefeld, which is why we are that bit more thankful for his involvement in the film.

“I created Deadpool,” Liefeld insists. “Absent me, he doesn't exist or make it to the page. His name, look, back story, Vanessa; that's all me. In as matter-of-fact as I can express it, because Fabian scripted Deadpool's first appearance, he is contextually entitled to equity and co-authorship. That was how the deal was set up in 1991. Pretty great deal, right? I'm happy for him. In short, I tell people that if Deadpool is kicking, shooting or cutting you while making a smart remark, that's me, that's Liefeld. He's had a great many writers give him some terrific wisecracks along the way, each contributing to the pantheon. Joe Kelly broke the fourth wall and added a whole new layer. Fabian's miniseries [*The Circle Chase*] with Joe Madureira is great, I love it – it's also chock-full of my characters and concepts like Zero, Vanessa and Kane.”

With the tone the *Deadpool* film is going for, it'll be difficult to weave him ➔

Deadpool on...

Greetings

“Hi. I'm Deadpool, and I'm going to shoot you now.”

Hobbies

“Been thinking about starting up a superhero porn site, whaddyou think?”

Food

“Did someone say ‘chimichanga’? Never mind, that was just the sound of my skull and brains healing.”

Duct tape

“Man, I love duct tape. I love how it tapes. I love the sound it makes. I love saying it. Duct tape, duct tape, duct tape. Duct tape, duct tape, duct tape...”

Electronics

“My TV didn't work so I kicked it and it started working again.”

His appearance

“Hey, if you looked like Ryan Reynolds crossed with a Shar-Pei, you'd understand.”

Saving people

“Citizens! It is time to be thrown violently to safety!”

Intimacy

“No one could bear to look at me ever again. Never again would I feel a woman's soft touch on my... er, cheek.”

Superpowers

“Shhh. My common sense is tingling.”

Family

“I'll never have a son, but if I did and he came out half as awesome as you... what I'm trying to say... I'll always be there when you need me.”

One Deadpool and two guns can easily take on a crowd of criminals.



➤ and the X-Men together in any future spin-offs, what with the former's tendency to break the fourth wall and the X-Men being, well, the X-Men. The two properties are unlikely to mix well, which is probably for the best. But if push comes to shove and Fox wants to sell that combination, Liefeld could probably think of a way to do it. After all, he's done it before. It's not his most well-known project, but his talents were a huge part of the success of the *New Mutants* and *X-Force* graphic novels, coming up with the characters and plots while Nicieza provided the dialogue.

"I was never just the artist," he tells us. "I had earned my seat as the writer of the book, and issue #98 [which introduced Deadpool] was my first issue as a writer. I am listed and credited, and have equity as the writer of all those stories. That's how the 1991 contract reads, and the fans of that era remember very vividly the wild rides I provided them. I conceived of the stories and Fabian provided dialogue, word balloons that reflected my agenda and motivations. It's the same way I've worked for two decades. Occasionally I'll provide dialogue if time permits. All those *New Mutants* and *X-Force* stories and all those characters were generated by a very hyperactive young 20-something, and I wish I could go back and give young Rob a hug. Those characters weren't created in some company creative retreat: I imagined them onto the page, gave them a story and boom, we were off to the races!

"I pitched Deadpool to Marvel, very simply, as Spider-Man with guns and swords, with ties to the Weapon X programme [that created Wolverine]. It was a potent commercial concept, and I think that's turned out pretty well for everyone."

It's not just the film that uses Liefeld as a model to aspire to. *Deadpool* is a fairly new creation compared to other Marvel properties like *Captain America* and *Iron Man*, but it's still making an impact within the Marvel Comics universe. Liefeld's work has been such an asset to the brand that it created what it called 'Liefeld Corner', an area with all the toys and merchandise based on his work displayed as a sort of tribute. After a difficult relationship with the company, Liefeld left Marvel to form Image Comics, but Liefeld's Corner is still standing.

"Especially with a *Deadpool* film surging and the rampant rumours of an

X-Force movie coming hot on its heels," he says. "They've never stopped using my catalogue of characters in some form or another. And for that I am very grateful to both Marvel and the fans, who have never stopped expressing

"I PITCHED DEADPOOL TO MARVEL AS SPIDER-MAN WITH GUNS AND SWORDS, WITH TIES TO WEAPON X"

ROB LIEFELD

their enthusiasm for my characters and designs. Thank you!"

After the excitement off the back of the film dies down (we reckon that will take us up to summer), *Deadpool* fans will be able to crack into a new story with Liefeld's upcoming graphic novel *Bad Blood*. Those craving back story will be pleased to know that it is set to fill in key details of Deadpool's past. It's also the first original graphic novel about the character that Marvel has ever published.

"I only wanted to do a project like this if it meant I could add something to the character, to his back story, and give him a real conflict and challenge, and now we're doing just that," Liefeld explains. "It's very exciting, and the early feedback [from Marvel] has been amazing!"

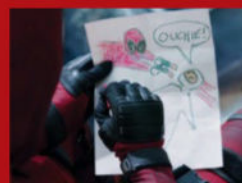
Bad Blood is being scripted by *X-Men '92* writers Chad Bowers and Chris Sims, but the plot, pencils and inks are all Liefeld's work. "It was our editor, Jordan White, who suggested I work with them, and I'm a big fan of their *X-Men '92* book, which revisits a classic era for the team," he tells us. "The stories there have featured Cable, Deadpool and X-Force over its run, so it's great to have them on board, and we'll be featuring a lot of the other characters I introduced during *New Mutants* and *X-Force*. For me, it's a story I've been thinking about for around 20 years, and I even started sketching it in my notebook back in 2007, which is something I do when I get ideas."

If Miller's film is as successful as we hope – and let's be honest, it definitely will be – will Liefeld become a household name? Will Fox be able to expand the universe and get something out of the rest of his catalogue of characters, or will they be cracking on with as many *Deadpool* sequels as they can?

"The Brett Ratner *Youngblood* movie didn't make it past the initial deal memo, so there was never a finalised agreement. Cable is on everyone's mind at the moment, but just as with *Deadpool*, when evidence of his existence on film is available you'll know it, and that will be a loud and potent explosion, I'm certain." ☞

We expect *Deadpool* to be released on Blu-ray and DVD in July 2016.

Negasonic Teenage Warhead and Deadpool team up to fight crime.





Arrow to the head

This is what happens when you don't pay attention in target practice.

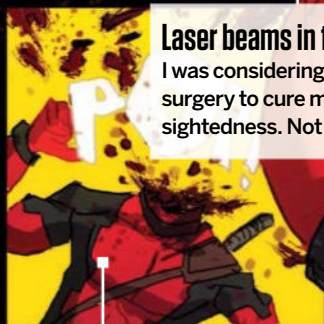
Decapitated

I'm going to have a headache in the morning.



Laser beams in the eyeballs

I was considering laser-eye surgery to cure my short-sightedness. Not anymore.



Head blown up

The only thing worse than being decapitated is when your head comes off via explosion.

Elephant tusk through the gut

Like the elephant, the most majestic of all wounds, and yet the hardest to explain.

De-legged

I guess I'll just sit here until my leg grows back. Might as well order a pizza.

Glass everywhere

You know when you get a splinter and it feels like your life has ended? This is a million times worse.

Dagger to the temple

Sometimes the angle of the dagger relaxes me, but sometimes it just makes me soil myself.

Knives to the shoulder

It's like being given the cold shoulder and being stabbed in the back at the same time.

Disarmed

Disarmed? Get it? Because my arm has been chopped? Ha, ha, ha! I'm in so much pain.

How THE MERC GETS MURKED

Being able to heal yourself means you spend a lot of time getting maimed...

BATMAN



BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE

THE COUNTDOWN TO CINEMA'S ULTIMATE
SUPERHERO SCRIMMAGE IS ALMOST
OVER, BUT THE DC CINEMATIC UNIVERSE
IS ONLY JUST GETTING STARTED. WE TALK
TO PRODUCERS **CHARLES ROVEN** AND
DEBORAH SNYDER ABOUT **BATMAN V
SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE**, **WONDER
WOMAN**, **JUSTICE LEAGUE** AND MORE...

SUPERMAN

FIGHT OF THE CENTURY

IF A CINEMATIC GRUDGE MATCH BETWEEN BATMAN AND SUPERMAN, THE TWO BIGGEST COMIC-BOOK CHARACTERS IN EXISTENCE, HAD BEEN ANNOUNCED A COUPLE OF DECADES ago, back when superheroes still wore their underpants over their leotards, everyone would have lost their shit. Now, however, it's more difficult to provoke that kind of reaction. The game has been upped since then, but the audience is more cynical, and it's considerably harder not only to impress, but to get people excited at all.

Marvel's *Avengers Assemble* became the benchmark for superhero team-ups in 2012 when it brought together six of Earth's Mightiest Heroes for an epic battle through New York City. To make an impact, you have to be on that level. Up to this point, DC movies have stayed within the lines of the tried-and-tested formula: one good guy fights a couple of bad guys. *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice* is shaking things up. Now, we have two good guys fighting each other, with a couple of bad guys standing on the sidelines, egging them on. This isn't a superhero team-up; it's a superhero smack down, and presumably there can only be one winner.

As a direct sequel to *Man Of Steel*, *Batman V Superman* is set to take place about a year after the Black Zero Event, when the Kryptonians came down to Earth. "We're kind of seeing that although he has good intentions, sometimes when Superman intervenes there are consequences he doesn't expect," says producer Deborah Snyder. "I think that's a really interesting thing to talk about. What if there was this alien, this god from another planet with these amazing superpowers? Would you want him to intervene? Under what jurisdiction is he? I guess he lives in the US, so he falls under their jurisdiction. Do they want to use him as a weapon? What is he supposed to do in his role? Who is he supposed to save? I think when some

In *Batman V Superman*, the world is torn on whether Kal-El is a hero.

of the consequences he doesn't expect happen, he begins to question his role and his place in the world.

"[*Batman V Superman*] still puts our characters into a real-world scenario, and that's what is interesting to me. I think it's about seeing these characters with these superpowers existing in our world, and what are the implications of that and what does it mean for society? What does it mean for religion? What does it mean for national security? I think it really stirs conversation, and those are the movies that are most interesting to me personally."

It's not just Superman who has to live with the consequences of the Black Zero Event. The fallout from the battle with Zod was a lot bigger than the US could have imagined. After all the violence, the terror and the destruction of property, he's giving superheroes a bad name, and Batman's not having any of it. "I think [Batman] feels that



someone with such enormous power that could do anything he wants is a dangerous thing, because even if there's a one per cent chance that he could act against us and harm our interests, America's interests or even humanity for that matter, then he's very dangerous," Snyder tells us. "When we come to Gotham, crime has been down because he's doing such a great job and has cleaned up the city so much. I think he's maybe taken it too far. There's a fear that's kind of controlling a lot of the crime in Gotham."

As if the titular skirmish wasn't enough to get excited about, *Batman V Superman* will of course also introduce Ben Affleck's interpretation on the Caped Crusader. "Ben's take on Batman evolves from Chris Terrio's script and Zack Snyder's overseeing of it," says producer Charles Roven. "Ben just takes it to a wonderful level. He realises it in a wonderful way, which is

From what we've heard, Gal Gadot's performance will be a sight to behold.



THE FUTURE IS FEMALE

Deborah Snyder on why Wonder Woman & Gal Gadot are forces to be reckoned with

What has made you most excited about working on a film of this scale?

The fact that we have Wonder Woman in the movie and that we're seeing her on the screen for the first time is such an important moment. It's such a defining moment. I believe that there needs to be more strong female roles just in general for women, especially in the action genre. She is like the pinnacle of characters. She represents so much for women.

Throughout history she's changed and evolved and really reflected the time of women's place in society, and I think now, with so much talk about gender equality, it's fitting that she's going to be gracing the screen for the first time in *Batman V Superman*, as well as having her first standalone movie that we've been shooting in London. To me, that is the most exciting thing.

What kind of bearing does Wonder Woman have on the plot of this film?

I can't tell you that! [laughs] Let's just say that it's her first introduction. The film is mostly about Batman and Superman and what their struggles are, but she does play an integral role, especially at the end of the film. I think audiences will definitely want to see more from her after seeing it. I know I do!

What is Gal like in the role?

Gal's amazing. You have so many kids that look up to these heroes – they can't necessarily distinguish between an actor playing the role. It's, 'No! *This* is Wonder Woman!' Even my kids go, 'Are you going to work with Superman and Batman today?' They've met them, but they're still Superman and Batman!

Finding the right person to play Wonder Woman was critical, because she's going to be a role model for women of all ages, and how she acts and behaves in her personal persona of who she is, and how she would react to fans, we had to take that into consideration, and Gal is just an amazing person. She's positive and energetic and sweet and hopeful, and she's an amazing mother and an amazing daughter to her mum, and she personified all those qualities that we would want in a person who is going to represent her.

She's a hard worker. She had to work out really hard because she will admit that when she came into the role she's always had more of a model-type body, and physically we wanted to make sure she was strong. She has been training so hard. Since *Batman V Superman*, it's been a constant training regime to be fit and strong and healthy. So I just couldn't be happier with Gal in this role, as is everybody.

ALTHOUGH HE HAS GOOD INTENTIONS, SOMETIMES WHEN SUPERMAN INTERVENES THERE ARE CIRCUMSTANCES HE DOESN'T EXPECT... HE BEGINS TO QUESTION HIS PLACE IN THE WORLD

DEBORAH SNYDER

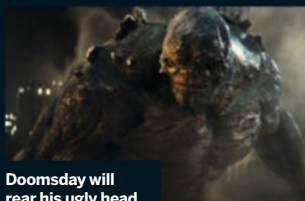
Bruce's enmity with Superman stems from the destruction in *Man Of Steel*.



➤ the toughest, most seasoned, oldest Batman that we've seen. He's battling and he's been desensitized and he's been hardened by the experiences he's had over a number of years that he's been Batman. Is the character the Bat, or is he still Bruce Wayne?"

"I think it's a really interesting take, and a really nice juxtaposition that we have," says Snyder. "Henry [Cavill] in *Man Of Steel*, he just kind of figured out his powers and he started becoming this superhero. He's next to Ben Affleck's Batman, who has been doing this a long time. He's jaded, he's seen so many things, and obviously I think both their point of views would differ based on the experiences or lack of experiences that they have had being a superhero. I think that's a really interesting dynamic in the movie."

"It's enormously exciting for me to see this match of these two amazing superheroes. The fact that the characters have been around for over 75 years means there's a history in cross-cultural, and it seems to appeal to many different generations. To be able to bring them together in this way on the big screen for the first time, it's enormously exciting."



Doomsday will rear his ugly head.



Although *Man Of Steel* technically became the first film of the DC Extended Universe in 2013, *Batman V Superman* is going to be making more waves than its prequel ever could. It's being treated as a launch pad for the rest of the universe, one that will not only introduce us to these brand new versions of Batman and Gotham, but the world of the Justice League.

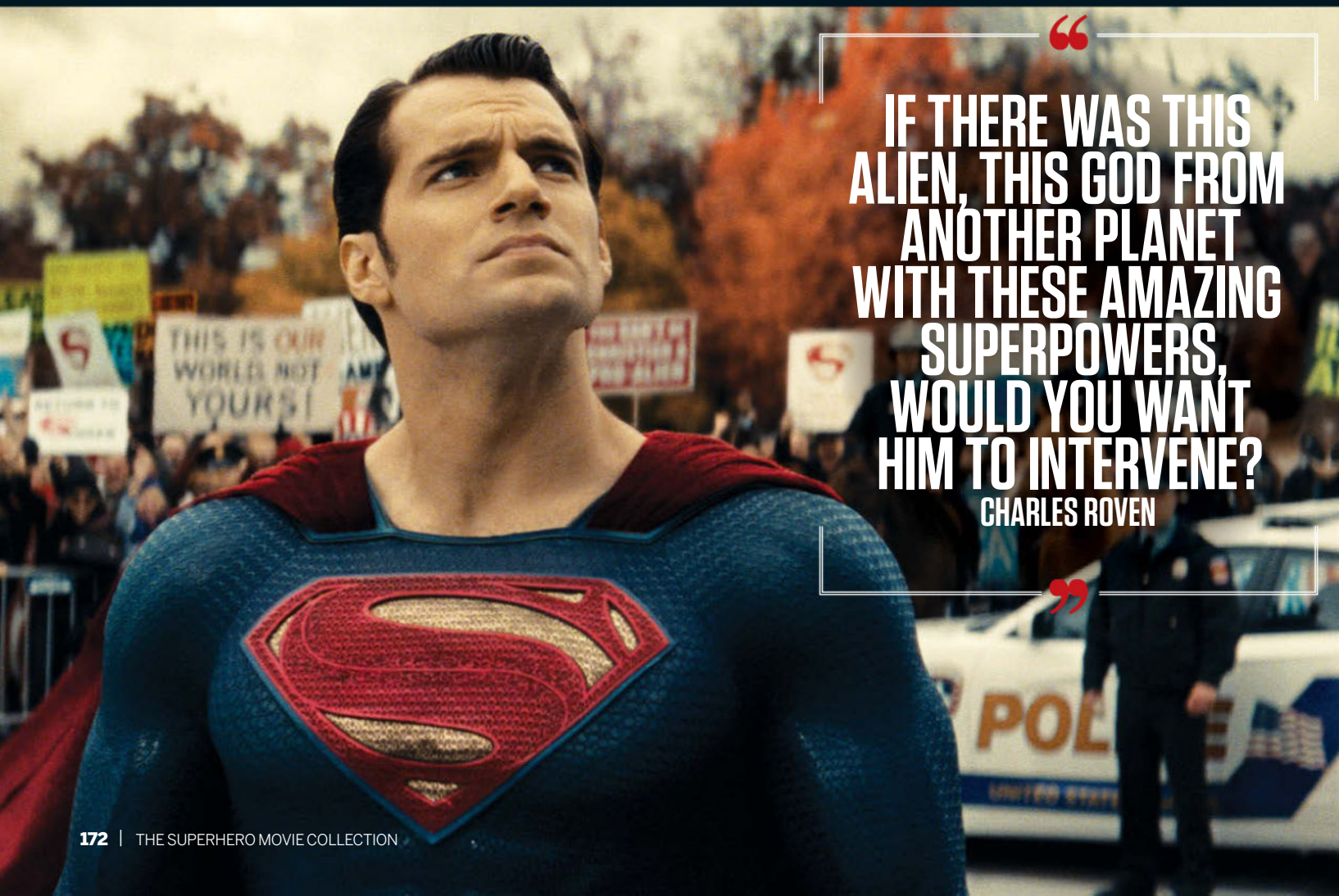
"We do different things in *Batman V Superman* than we did in *Man Of Steel*," Roven tells us. "We've taken the story, even though it's related to *Man Of Steel*, in a sensible but slightly different direction that also makes it pretty clear that it's a gateway to the *Justice League* movies and the other Justice League characters. We sort of planted that in *Man Of Steel* as well; we just didn't hint it as hard as we do in *Batman V Superman*. It's why we called [the film] what we called it: *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice*."

"It continues to stand outwardly as opposed to being closed and inward, so we like that, just like *Man Of Steel* let you know, if you look at all the Easter eggs, that Lex exists even though you don't see him, and Bruce Wayne exists because there's Wayne Industries on

the satellite. We've allowed for super abilities, and we've allowed for aliens to exist because Superman is an alien. We expand on all of that in *Batman V Superman*, and also introduce you to other member of the *Justice League* universe, and we're standing out from that. We want these movies to build on each other."

As the gateway to the rest of the Justice League, it would have been very easy for *Batman V Superman* to lose its way. Huge franchises have been known to fall into the trap of focusing too much on world-building and set-up early on. But Snyder reassures us that this isn't the case this time. The film is very much an epic in its own right.

"You have to focus on the story that you're delivering and make sure it's the best movie possible," she says. "On the other hand, you're serving this larger universe, and so talk a lot about what the plan is for the future, and what is the timeline. So even when there are these single movies, they all fit into a particular timeline, they all make sense, they all work together because they're all in the same universe. You have to have a particular amount of planning, but at the same time you have to tell



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**IF THERE WAS THIS
ALIEN, THIS GOD FROM
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SUPERPOWERS,
WOULD YOU WANT
HIM TO INTERVENE?**

CHARLES ROVEN

the story that you're telling in the best possible way, and service that story. It started out as another Superman film, and then Zack started thinking about what would be interesting. He said, 'You know, we've seen it in comics, but we've never seen it on the big screen, this battle between these two characters, and wouldn't that be amazing?' Then it kind of just took off from there."

THE SECOND TRAP THIS FILM COULD STUMBLE INTO WOULD BE COMPARING ITSELF TO CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S DARK KNIGHT TRILOGY. THERE, WE HAVE A SERIES that became a turning point for comic-book movies: they proved superheroes didn't have to be campy, colourful and in-your-face to make an impact. They could be cool, dramatic and artistic. After its immense success, Nolan's series would be a great benchmark for any project, but if *Batman V Superman* draws too much inspiration from it, it would end up being compared to it forever by both fans and critics alike. 'Not as good as the *Dark Knight* trilogy' is not an ideal description. Thankfully, Snyder insists that those close comparisons were not the case during production on the film.

"I think the world is so different," she says. "Christopher Nolan, who's an executive producer with [his wife Emma Thomas], and who produced *Man Of Steel*, are very good friends of ours. We love the movies that they make. I think the story is so different and our Batman is so different that everything about it just felt very different, so it wasn't a comparison when we were making it along the way. Of course, with the iconic moments you're like, 'Okay, how are we going to do the death of the parents, or how are we going to do the moment when he flies, or what are we going to do with the Batmobile?' Because you've seen what was done in the past.

"You're always striving, and Zack especially has a very strong point of view, and really makes things his own with his unique style. We weren't really comparing along the way because it was so very different. This is also the first time, you know... Chris's *Dark Knight* trilogy was a very closed universe. It was only that one particular character. There wasn't room for any other characters in the world, but the world that we created is a world where Gotham and Metropolis exist. Not only do they exist, but they are kind of across the river from each other. So I think we were really just working on the details that would make our world ➤

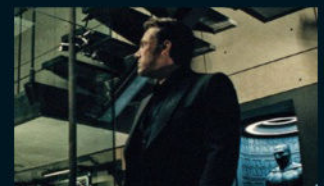


Zack Snyder behind the camera with Ben Affleck.

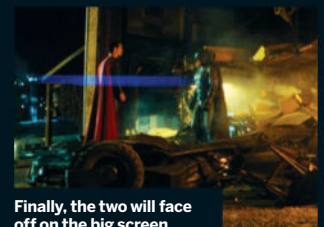


Batman V Superman's take on Batman draws closely from Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*.

Lex Luthor (Jesse Eisenberg) with his assistant, Mercy Graves (Tao Okamoto).



This incarnation of Bruce Wayne is older and more world-weary.



Finally, the two will face off on the big screen.

**BEN IS THE TOUGHEST,
OLDEST AND MOST
SEASONED BATMAN WE'VE
SEEN. HE'S BEEN HARDENED
AND DESENSITISED BY
HIS EXPERIENCES OVER
THE YEARS**
CHARLES ROVEN

make sense. Really, we didn't have to try and make comparisons."

From the audience's point of view, the comparisons with Nolan's series are inevitable, as are comparisons with what Marvel is doing now. To many, DC and Marvel seem to be in constant competition. DC announced *Wonder Woman*; Marvel decided to make a *Captain Marvel* film. Marvel brought the Avengers together for the one of the biggest movies of all time, and DC is planning an even bigger team-up with *Justice League*. Visit any comments section on the internet, and you're sure to find a DC fan slagging off Marvel followers and vice versa. It's relentless. But according to Snyder, it's a perception that only fans hold.

"I think what we're both doing is very different, but the bottom line is that [Marvel's] success and our success is good for both of us. The fact that these comic-book characters that have stood the test of time are now coming to the big screen, that's amazing. It's an amazing thing for comics. I think the more success for both of us means the better it is for comics – and for movies! We want people to go to movies."

AS WELL AS OPENING THE DOORS TO AN OLDER BATMAN, *BATMAN V SUPERMAN* IS ALSO GOING TO PRESENT US WITH BRAND NEW TAKES ON A FEW OF other iconic characters from the DC Comics universe, particularly power-mad businessman/supervillain Lex Luthor, played by Jesse Eisenberg. Lex's limited appearances in the film's trailers already stand out as unusual simply because of how young he is and because of the fact that he still has hair.

"We wanted Lex to be, you know, it's the modern world, so what is the modern businessman like?" says Snyder. "He's different than he has ever been before. He's always one step ahead. We did a scene at a party that he was hosting, and it's really interesting when you see the physicality of Ben as Bruce Wayne and the physicality of Henry, even when he's playing Clark Kent, and then there's Jesse, who's slight and wiry. But what you realise is intellectually he is far superior to either one of them. He's the puppet master controlling the whole scene. I think that's a really interesting dynamic. It's something we haven't seen before."

And then, of course, there's *Wonder Woman*, played by the brilliant Gal Gadot. It's an exciting time to be a *Wonder Woman* fan. We've only been treated to glimpses of her in a couple



of the *Batman V Superman* trailers, so we're still not sure how much she'll feature in the actual film. But Roven promises that however much of her we get will be worth it. "We'll get a taste, and hopefully you'll understand her head space by the time the movie is over and where she's coming from," he says. "In *Wonder Woman*, you'll find out how she got to be where she is. But we're excited about it."

"She's appropriately dynamic and charismatic. And she's fun to watch! Most of her interaction is with Bruce Wayne, and I think there's a really playful quality in their exchanges... I'm hoping [the fans] will be pleasantly surprised and enjoy her. We certainly do. We think she's great."

"I really am excited for the *Wonder Woman* film," enthuses Snyder. "I just think it's about time. I love the script, and I'm thrilled to have hired the first female director to bring her to the big screen. The fact that Patty Jenkins will be the first woman to direct a big studio tent-pole action film is amazing, so on so many levels that is the film I'm most proud of... We met Patty when we were doing our director search for *Wonder Woman*, and we made a conscious effort to hire a woman. We felt like it was very important. For me, I thought,

'How could I produce this movie and not hire a female director?' It was a no-brainer. Coincidentally, about seven years ago, Patty has had a passion for this character and approached Warner Bros and kind of pitched her idea, and it just didn't get off the ground. So I think for Patty, this is a dream that's been in the making for many years and I think she just turned out to be the right person in so many respects. She's doing an amazing job."

The reaction to the first few trailers for *Batman V Superman* has been phenomenal. It's very difficult to watch two of the biggest titans in superhero history brush shoulders and throw abuse at each other without having a massive grin on your face. Five minutes of action-packed footage with a dramatic soundtrack thrown over the top of it is enough to reduce even the most serious of comic-book movie fans to a state of giddy childlike glee.

Roven reveals that he's delighted with the reaction to the trailers, just as we're excited by the trailers themselves. "Some of the feedback from the fans is always surprising, because there are so many rumours coming out of what they see and how they dissect it, and it's always interesting and fun to watch different takes on it," he says.

"We love the fact that the fans really are as dedicated as they are. At the same time we don't want to acknowledge any of their questions and queries or their thoughts and things that they believe in because we don't want to destroy the feeling when they discover for themselves what's for real. I'm excited to get the audience feedback, I'm excited to be involved in the universe – I grew up reading comics – and it's just a real joy to be able to play in this sandbox every morning."

"There are going to be a few surprises left when people are seeing *Batman V Superman*. I don't want to give any of it away," says Snyder. "At the same time, we're in full pre-production on *Justice League*, so we're working a lot with Flash and Cyborg and Aquaman, and that's really exciting, because having all these amazing characters, working on their costumes and figuring out how do we show their powers for a visual effects standpoint, it's a lot of problem solving, and it's an honour to be working on the movie with these characters that have been around for so long."

Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice is out in cinemas now.

Judging by this image, the fight might not be the forgone conclusion it should be.



For the first time, Superman will truly let loose.



CRIMINAL DAMAGE

How much would it cost to fix the damage done by Supes in *Man Of Steel*?

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[5797866]

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Address unknown

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Destroyed three corn fields **\$1,200**

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Destroyed 100+ cars **\$1,200,000**

Destroyed small town **\$30,000,000**

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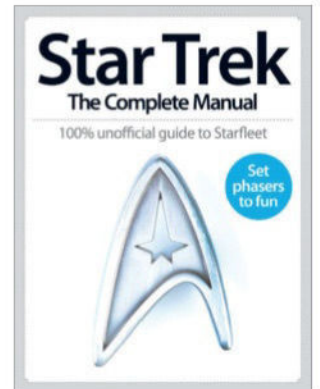
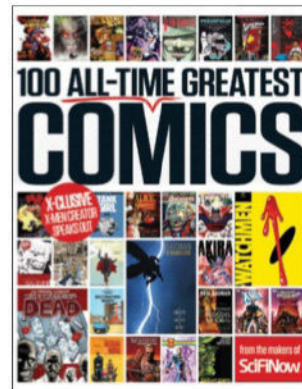
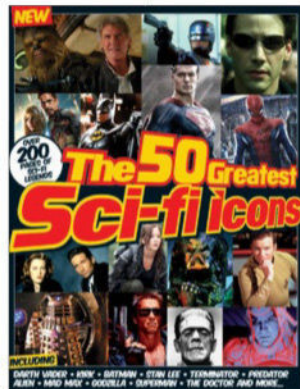
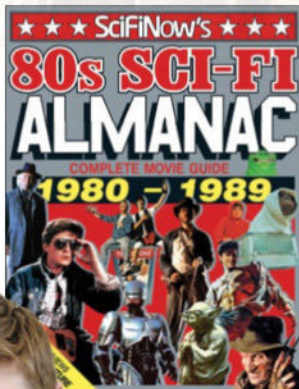
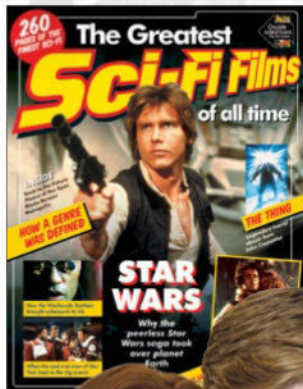


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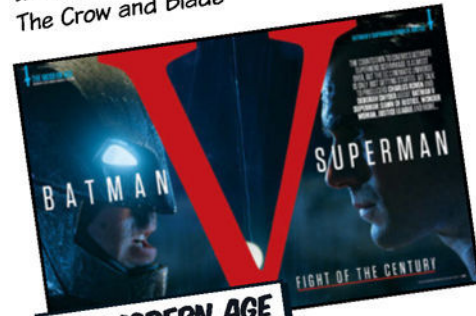
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